

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Margaret WHITE

Support person present: No

1. My name is Margaret White. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1954. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before Nazareth House

2. My family originally lived in Glasgow. In the late 1950's, we moved to Ayrshire with my father's work. At that time there was my father, mother and brother. My other two brothers were born after we moved to Ayrshire.
3. I went to Aberdeen at eighteen to study a BSc geography degree at Aberdeen University. I got my place at Aberdeen University after an appeal, which meant that I was late starting. I attended Mass at the Catholic Chaplaincy and joined the Catholic Society and made a lot of friends there. When I was at Aberdeen I was known by my maiden name Anderson.
4. At some point I heard that Nazareth House was looking for people to help on Saturday afternoons and I agreed to go along. My classes didn't finish until six on a Friday. This meant I couldn't make the last train back home. As a result, I was having to stay in Aberdeen the whole weekend anyway, so it suited me to help out. I think I was nineteen when I started volunteering at Nazareth House. There was no formal vetting process or references requested.

5. I knew of Nazareth House as my maternal grandmother had been in Nazareth House Cardonald up until she died in 1971. I was aware that they looked after children and the elderly.

Nazareth House, Aberdeen

Introduction to Nazareth House

6. Nazareth House was a big imposing building. This didn't matter to me because I had been regularly to Nazareth House at Cardonald, which was a similarly imposing building. I entered by the front door and there was a big parlour on the right. I can't remember who I met when I arrived. I was then introduced to Sister [REDACTED] Sister [REDACTED] was sometimes referred to as Sister [REDACTED]. There was a Mother Superior in overall charge of the home but in I never really had much to do with her.
7. I was at Nazareth House between 1974 and 1977. This was most Saturdays. I lived at the house when I worked there for the summer in 1976 and 1977. I wasn't actually employed. It was on a board and keep basis. When I was staying at the home I resided in the attic area with some of the staff.
8. I wasn't employed at the home. I was there as a volunteer. I had no previous training or experience working with children apart from working at holiday play schemes at Prestwick Academy in the summers of 1974 & 1975.
9. I didn't have a specific role. I was told I was there just to have fun with the kids. I think to try and tire them out. I would maybe start around eleven or twelve on a Saturday. There was no set time for finishing. It would just be when I had finished helping with what needed to be done. Some days it might be after the youngest children had their baths and went to bed.

Group structure

10. From what I can remember there were five different groups at the home. I was in Sister [LJI] group. There was another group in the floor above. In 1977 this was Sister [LRB]. Sister [LKH] group was in a separate house in an adjacent road backing onto the grounds. There were two groups on the ground floor one was a new build. This "new build" group was looked after by Sister [LDX]. I should say that Sister [LDX] might actually have been Sister [LDX]. I'm not sure the correct order of the names. I can't remember anything about the fifth group.
11. I'm sure Sister [LJI] was the same age as my father. I remember they met once after my graduation in July 1977. It turned out they were born the same year, 1924.
12. As well as the sister in charge of the group there were two full time members of staff. In Sister [LJI] group there was Dorothy Murray and Marie Clark. I think they might have worked shifts. There were also two cleaners Mrs Adams and Mrs Scorgie. I think that they both worked during the week. I must have seen them when I was working in the summer because I don't think that they worked weekends.
13. There were a maximum of twenty children in each group. In Sister [LJI] group the ages were from two or three years old to thirteen or fourteen. In Sister [LRB] group the youngest was a girl called [REDACTED]. The families would come in groups of three or four. This meant that you might only have four or five different families in each group. As far as I am aware families were kept together. That was the beauty of Nazareth House. Sometimes I was present when new families came in, that's how I know what happened to them. I wasn't aware who was in other groups so there may have been other family members in different groups.

14. The families that I remember were the [REDACTED] the [REDACTED] and the two [REDACTED] boys from Aberdeen. The [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were from Glasgow. There were four siblings in each of these families. I do know of other families, but I don't remember much about them.
15. The [REDACTED] were four sisters. It was quite sad I was told that their mother had died, and the father kept the boys but put the girls into care. Their names were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They were Sister [REDACTED] LJI [REDACTED] favourites. I heard [REDACTED] was a baby when she came to the home and Sister [REDACTED] LJI [REDACTED] had looked after her since then.
16. There were others like the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who were not her favourites. I liked them probably because I was also from Glasgow.
17. I remember two brothers from Glasgow, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I heard that they had witnessed a murder. They were a handful and I think Sister [REDACTED] LJI [REDACTED] struggled a bit with them at times. They would have disturbed sleep especially [REDACTED]. Witnessing a murder had obviously affected them.
18. I was with Sister [REDACTED] LJI [REDACTED] group about a year. I then moved to Sister [REDACTED] LRB [REDACTED] group. I liked both Sister [REDACTED] LJI [REDACTED] and Sister [REDACTED] LRB [REDACTED] but they were different. I think it was a generation thing. Sister [REDACTED] LRB [REDACTED] was a lot younger and was really enthusiastic. She was very outgoing and liked wildlife films. Sister [REDACTED] LJI [REDACTED] I would say was more old school.

Routine at Nazareth House

19. In 1976 & 1977 when I worked during the summer months at the home. I did different shifts. This would be either a morning or afternoon. There were also days off.

Dormitories

20. The nuns tried to keep families together in separate rooms. The boys and girls were always in different rooms. I don't know if a member of staff slept next to the bedrooms. I remember that Sister [LRB] had a room next to the bedrooms on her floor.

Mealtimes / Food

21. There was a large dining area. This had a hatch from the kitchen area where you would take the food from for the children. I would help out with serving the meals. For breakfast this might be cereal. I would say that the food was generally good. I don't think that it was that bad. I'm not a fancy eater.
22. I never ate with the kids as I would have things to do. I would be helping make sure that they had their meals. After this I would make sure that they were washed and ready to go out for the day. I think that I probably had my meal after the children had theirs.
23. When we were staying at Tombae near Tomintoul, in the summer, I remember that some of the food was brought from Aberdeen. There were really big catering tins and also powdered soup. You added boiling water to the soup. It was horrible. You have to remember though that this was forty years ago, and times were different.

Chores

24. The only thing that the children would be asked to help with was making their own beds. One of the children, [LTO] who is now a friend of mine, would help out in the parlour. She would be given extra pocket money for this.

Washing / bathing

25. Some nights I would help out with the baths. There was a big bathroom. The baths were partitioned off separately. The sinks were all separate as well. As far as I know the children had a bath every night.

Clothing / uniform

26. Clothing for the children was provided by the staff. Some of the children had nothing when they came to the home. There was a clothes store on each floor for the different groups. The children didn't have to wear a set uniform in the home. Each child had play clothes, dress up clothes and their Sunday best which they wore to Mass. I always thought that the children were well dressed at the home. I remember one occasion when I accompanied a member of staff and two children from Sister [LRB] group to purchase clothes at Esslemont and McIntosh store, Union Street in Aberdeen. This was for their return home to Drumchapel.

Personal possessions

27. The children were given pocket money. We would also spend money on them. If the children didn't have pocket money this was generally because they had done something wrong and hadn't been given any.
28. Some of the children didn't arrive with anything. They eventually had their own possessions. This could be if they were given something when they were at the home. When I moved groups, I gave the children some posters for their rooms.

School

29. The younger children went to St Peters primary school. They went there by public transport. There wasn't a minibus or anything like that to take them.

The older children went to Rubislaw Academy as there wasn't a Catholic secondary school in Aberdeen at that time.

30. The reason I know the children got the bus was that I saw them one day when I was on my way to a resit exam at the university.
31. I don't remember having to help the children with their homework.

Leisure time

32. There was lots for the children to do at the home. They had board games, cards and books. There was also a television that they could watch in the sitting room.
33. There was a playground in the grounds of the home. I think there was a climbing frame as well.
34. If I was working a later shift I might have read the children a bedtime story. The children would also read stories to each other.
35. Sometimes on a Saturday trainee priests would come from Blairs College, which was a seminary, with a priest. They would go outside and play football with the boys. I remember one of the trainee priests that came was called Donald Cummings.

Religion

36. The children would go to Mass every Sunday. They would all go as a group around ten in the morning. The Mass was for everyone even if they weren't Catholic.
37. In those days there was a fast before communion but not for the children. This was only for the adults. There were two boys [REDACTED] who served

on the altar. They weren't Catholic so they couldn't take communion. This always surprised me that they were on the altar even though they weren't Catholic.

38. When we were on holiday at Tombae in the summer you would still go to Mass on a Sunday. The chapel was next to where we stayed at the Chapel House.
39. After Mass the children would change out of their Sunday best clothes.

Trips / Holidays

40. On a Saturday we would always walk to where we were going. I took the children to places like Duthie Park. There were also visits to the Bon Accord baths. I would always let Sister [REDACTED] LJI know where we were taking the children. There was never a problem, but it would be up to her to say if it was okay or not.
41. When I worked in the summer I went with the children on holiday to Tombae. Two or three groups at a time would go. We stayed there for three weeks. There were two separate buildings. One was a school and the other was the Chapel house. Sister [REDACTED] LJI always stayed in the Chapel house. The school was split into two halves. One for the boys and the other for the girls.
42. I think the first time I went there was by minibus. This was driven by Sister [REDACTED] LKH. The second time I went I was only there two weeks. My mum & dad dropped me off with [REDACTED] LTO as I had just graduated with my BSc degree at the university. This was in July 1977.
43. When we were at Tombae the children didn't have a bath every night. They would have been swimming in the river or out walking all day and be absolutely shattered. By that time, they were ready for bed.

Birthdays and Christmas

44. I recall if one of the children had a birthday it was always celebrated with a party.
45. At Christmas there would be parties. The girls would wear pretty frocks. Christmas trees would also be put up in the home. I don't know what happened on Christmas Day as I went home for Christmas.

Other parties

46. We would also have parties at Halloween. The children and staff would all dress up. The Halloween party would be on a Saturday even if Halloween was on a week day.

Visits / Inspections

47. If there were visitors for the children, they would meet in the parlour. I think that the [REDACTED] had visitors because the family was from Aberdeen.
48. I never saw any visits or inspections by social services. I'm not aware of any time when there was a panic to have the home ready for an inspection. If there weren't any inspections it could be a good thing or a bad thing. If you don't look you will never know if there is anything wrong. I was certainly never there for any inspections.

Healthcare

49. When I was at the home I was never given any training like how to resuscitate anyone. The only health issue I remember for any of the children was when [REDACTED] had convulsions. I don't know what had happened to cause this. I think that she might have gone to hospital.

After this happened we were told to keep an eye on her in case she had any more convulsions. To me this shows that the children were cared for.

50. If a child came to the home, they would be checked for nits and lice. The sisters would delouse them. I wouldn't be allowed to do this as I wasn't staff. Once this had been done the child would meet the other children.
51. I never saw any of the children with injuries.

Bed Wetting

52. ██████████ used to wet the bed and Sister ██████████ LJI would make his life a misery. She wasn't sympathetic. She would say he was a "naughty boy" and "grow up". I think there should have been more empathy as he was only small. It clearly upset him wetting the bed. There was no physical abuse. It was more verbal abuse. It was making him feel guilty for what he had done. I thought that it was wrong. ██████████ would be upset and cry.
53. If we knew ██████████ had wet the bed, we would take the sheets to the laundry. Sister ██████████ LJI would still know if she checked his bed. I think ██████████ was about nine when he was wetting the bed.
54. ██████████ used to wet the bed as well. She was only five at this time. She would get away with it. I think Sister ██████████ LJI preferred the girls to the boys.

Punishments

55. I never saw any physical punishments. If I had seen this I would have spoken up. If a child had done something wrong they might get grounded. This would mean they weren't able to go the pictures or the swimming. I probably wouldn't

know what the punishments were for. I would just be aware because the child wasn't on the trip.

56. The only rule I can remember was no running in the corridor. I can't remember set rules and regulations. There were specific times for waking the children up and times for meals.
57. There were no punishments that I can remember like being locked up in a room or similar. The children could be told off for things like splashing in the bath. The kids would squabble sometimes, and you would have to sort this out. It would be whoever was there that might give a child a row. I don't remember anything serious that needed passed up the line. There was never anything formal. They weren't a bad bunch. You might have to let someone know that you have gave someone a telling off and what this was for.

Moving groups

58. Sister [REDACTED] LJI spoiled [REDACTED] She had mothered her since she was a baby. I thought that Sister [REDACTED] LJI was too close to her. One day I scolded [REDACTED] for doing something wrong. I can't remember what it was she had done. [REDACTED] told Sister [REDACTED] LJI that I had scolded her. After this Sister [REDACTED] LJI came to see me. She asked why I had given [REDACTED] a row. Sister [REDACTED] LJI was furious with me. I told her that she can't have double standards and it was wrong to have favourites. I would have given a row to any of the other children if the same thing had happened.
59. After this happened one of the staff, [REDACTED], said to me I shouldn't have said that to Sister [REDACTED] LJI. This was when I found out that she had looked after [REDACTED] since she was a baby.
60. The next year, 1977, when I went back to the home I wasn't needed for Sister [REDACTED] LJI group. I don't know who made the decision. I was then

asked to go to Sister [LRB] group. I had a really good relationship with Sister [LRB]

Children leaving Nazareth House

61. The only children I was aware of leaving when I was at the home were the [REDACTED]. There were four of them. The [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] left when we were in Tombae. The children in the groups I worked with were all younger than sixteen, so I don't think it would be possible for them to leave. There might have been others that left but I can't remember.

Knowledge of other Children

62. One of the girls I knew, [REDACTED] used to hit her head off the walls and hide in cupboards or wardrobes. We would coax her out and try to help her. I think that this was a mental health issue. She was a very distressed child. If this happened I would tell Sister [LRB]. I don't know if she recorded this. [REDACTED] had an older brother [REDACTED] and two younger siblings [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
63. There were two half-brothers [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] was half Asian and dark skinned. The boy's "father" would come up and take [REDACTED] out but not [REDACTED]. When this happened, we would look after [REDACTED] in case he was distressed.
64. I also knew of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] but not that well. There was also a family, the [REDACTED]. They were in Sister [LRB] group.

Knowledge of Sisters

65. I remember the names of some of the other sisters who were at Nazareth House when I was there. There was a Sister [LJS] Sister [LGQ] and a Sister [LVA]. I think that Sister [LVA] arrived after Sister [LJI] [REDACTED] who left after 1977.

Abuse at Nazareth House

66. I never witnessed any abuse at Nazareth House. There were no physical punishments where the children were hit. I never saw Sister [REDACTED] LJI Sister [REDACTED] LRB or any of the staff strike any of the children when I was there.

Leaving Nazareth House

67. In 1977 I finished my studies and moved away from Aberdeen. This was also when I stopped volunteering at Nazareth House.

Life after Nazareth House

68. After Aberdeen University I qualified as a geography teacher at Notre Dame College Glasgow. I eventually moved to Portsmouth after getting married in 1991.

Records

69. I wasn't aware of any records being kept at Nazareth House. I never saw Sister [REDACTED] LJI keeping any written evidence. I knew some information about the children and their families because I would be told this verbally. When being told about a family they would be referred to as [REDACTED] or whatever name it was that was being spoken about.
70. I have an album of photographs with contemporaneous descriptions from my time at Nazareth House. I am happy to share this with the Inquiry. The


photographs show that the children at Nazareth House were happy and looked after.

Other information

- 71. In my opinion the children at Nazareth House were happy, well fed and looked after. They tried to make it a family life. If I was put on the spot, it was more positive than negative given the background and experiences of some of the children.
- 72. I can only comment on when I was there. I can't say what Nazareth House was like before or after.

Hopes for the Inquiry

- 73. I think that the Child Abuse Inquiry had to be done. I think that it is right that both good and bad are looked at. It is important to remember that when I was there it was forty years ago when things were different.
- 74. One thought I do have is that if the nuns were covering things up why would they have us there as volunteers and allow me to take photographs. I know right from wrong. If I had seen something happening I would have reported it. I don't know who I would have reported it to at that time, but I would have spoken up.
- 75. 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... 

Date... *24th April 2018*