

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

LSU

Support person present: No

1. My name is LSU I was born as LSU My date of birth is 1944. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I went into care when I was a baby. I was put in an orphanage in Dumfries. I found out years later, when I was married with children, that I had brothers and sisters overseas. I just couldn't believe it. There were four boys and four girls. So there were eight of us altogether. I don't know how old I was when I went from the orphanage to Nazareth House in Kilmarnock. The nuns told us we were orphans and tramps and that's why they were looking after us. I think I've just blocked the early times out. I remember coming to Australia and that was the start of my life.

Migration

Arriving in Australia

3. I came to Australia in 1954 with my older sister, LST We were the only ones from the family sent away. I was nine going on ten. I have no memory of Kilmarnock or of the journey but I know it was by boat. I can remember getting off the ship and there being buses waiting to take us to Nazareth House, Camberwell. There seemed to be a lot of kids who came from all over to Australia from the British Isles. I think they split

us all up as we were going to different places. They didn't tell us anything, we were shown to a bus. Luckily, I stayed with my sister, LST

Life in care – receiving country

Nazareth House, Camberwell, Victoria, Australia

General

4. I can't remember who took us to Nazareth House, Camberwell. Nazareth House was set in a very well to do area of Melbourne. The building also housed elderly men and women. They were on the other side but they weren't far away from the girl's part. I think there were four levels. There was a level was called 'the flat roof' where we did exercise. It was a play sort of area. The bottom level was the dining and kitchen area.

First day at institution

5. I can't remember who took us to Camberwell or my first day there. I think I've suppressed it because I can't remember much about when I arrived. I just knew it was horrible. I don't know if, maybe because I had grown up in an orphanage, I just went along with it and thought "this is my life and I haven't got anybody". I was also very quiet in those days. I can vaguely remember lining up for a drink of orange juice. I think you had to go into a parlour with nuns and priests who interviewed you collectively. I remember the minute I walked into the place, it was hell. We used to call it "Nazzi house", it was like a jail.

Sisters

6. There was a Mother Superior who was in charge of the nuns but I can't remember her name. There was a Sister MEJ, Sister LSW and Sister LSV. We used to call Sister LSW LSW. She was brutal thing I've ever seen. She was the worst of them all. She was horrible. She was Irish and a little thing. I think she had a chip on her shoulder because she was so small. We called Sister LSV LSV.

There was also Sister Aquinas and Sister Elizabeth. There was a room for a priest to stay in. This was in case an old person died.

Other Staff

7. There were two handymen who lived in the house next door. They were called **LSZ** **LSZ** and **LTC**. I can't remember **LTC**'s surname. He was an old, holier-than-thou sort of person. **LSZ** was younger. He had a crush on my friend **LSZ** who was very pretty. We thought he was having an affair with Sister **LSW**.
8. If anything needed fixing those two men were called in. They were always there and often in a room with the nuns. I don't know what they were doing in there. They would come around when I was in the laundry or the kitchen but they weren't interested in me. I was too young.

Mornings

9. We slept in dormitories. I reckon there were a dozen of us in each one. We were split into our own age group. I didn't have much to do with my sister **LST** because she was older than me and therefore in a different dormitory. I was in the same dormitory the whole time I was in Nazareth House.
10. The nuns took turns to wake us up at seven o'clock for church. We had to kneel beside our beds and say our prayers. We went to mass for an hour every morning. The priest would come and say mass. After that we went for breakfast and so-called school.

Mealtimes

11. We were given porridge with lumps in it, I haven't eaten it since. If you didn't eat it you got a belting, or it was thrown over you or rubbed into your by hair by one of the nuns. Sister **LSV** and Sister **LSW** would do it. The nuns were always there watching us. It was different nuns in charge on different days so you never knew who you were going to get.

12. The food was horrible. It wasn't edible. I still can't eat properly now. We were forced to eat muck, and it put me off food because of the way it was thrown over you or rubbed in your hair. I dreaded the meals. If you didn't eat it you were belted black and blue or punished in some other way, like being made to scrub floors in the dining room. They made such a big deal of it, there could be a dozen of us not eating it. You didn't get off with it, nobody did, we were all punished.

School

13. We were mainly taught religion and the catechism. We had to learn the Catholic prayer book off by heart. The nuns taught us but I don't think they were even teachers. We got adding up and English but they didn't teach us History or Geography. I hadn't heard of algebra or geometry. It was just the basics so you didn't learn much. I was good at school because I enjoyed it. The school in Nazareth House only went to a certain level so they had to send us somewhere to be educated. We were too old to stay there not doing anything. When I got older, they sent me to Melbourne Tech for a term to learn typing and short-hand. I stayed there for a term but they gave up on me.

Chores

14. We had to do work after school. I just sort of floated around and did what I was told, scrubbing and polishing floors. It was a huge place. It was like something out of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. They had huge lino corridors and we had to get on our hands and knees and scrub them. If they weren't done properly, we had to go back and start them again. The cleaning took up hours for our day. After I had finished the floors, I'd have to go to the kitchen and peel the potatoes for all the old people. My sister was up with the elderly folk most of the time. She never had a break. I never went to the old people's part so I didn't have any contact with them.
15. Some of the older girls had to clean the windows. It was dangerous work. I never had to do that, I mainly did the scrubbing, the kitchen and the laundry. They didn't have cleaners, we did it all. We were slaves.

16. After your work you would have your tea and go to bed. We sometimes got a little bit of television when we got one. I can't even remember what we were watching because we were so shocked to have a television. I can remember having one near the end of my time there.

Bedtime

17. Bedtime was 6:00 pm or 7:00 pm. The lights went out and that was it. We weren't allowed to talk or do anything. The nuns had a little room to look into the dorm. They used to rotate week by week and watch us from their room. You wouldn't be out of bed because you would get whacked. We were terrified because we knew if we said the wrong thing, or stepped in the wrong spot, we would be punished with the stick or the strap.

Bedwetting

18. A lot of kids used to wet their beds through fear. In the mornings, they used to have to put the wet sheets over their heads and go out onto the veranda and stand with the sheet over their heads. It was horrible.

Washing and bathing/Hygiene

19. I hated the showers. They were down on the ground floor. The showers were all lined up. We might have one or two a week. The younger ones would strip off and the older ones would have to help them get washed. There were some really young ones there, maybe seven or eight years old. I was sort of in the middle of the groups. There were always nuns there watching us get washed. I just thought they were perverts.
20. It was a hell of a time having your period. They'd throw the sanitary towel at you and call you "filthy" and "disgusting". I used to think they were women and they had been through the same thing. I could never work that out. It was horrendous. You couldn't get a bra either. They would tell me that I didn't need one. You didn't have any modesty there. Personal hygiene was non-existent with them. It got to the stage that you were

frightened to even ask for anything like that because you got a mouthful or they'd throw it at you.

Leisure time

21. The flat roof had a tennis court. I never played because I was never picked. I was quiet and wasn't pushy. LST my sister was picked because of her age. The older ones seemed to get a bit more freedom than the younger ones. There was only about fourteen months between us. It was different for her because she was in a different age group. We used to go outside and do gym.
22. We always did religious concerts for special Sunday or saint's days for people who came in. We knew what day people were coming, it was usually on a Sunday. There were a lot of Catholics in the area, the orphanage was in a very Catholic neighbourhood.

Trips and holidays

23. We didn't really have holidays but we would be sent to stay with a family in the neighbourhood. We didn't have a choice, the nuns would tell us we were going. I used to go to stay with this family called the [REDACTED] They had eight kids of their own and I was their little slave. They lived in [REDACTED] in Mount Albert which was a very posh area. They had a huge house. I would wait in the front parlour for them to pick me up. I had to clean up after them at meal times and wash the floors. They were nice people but they were using me.
24. We usually broke up just before Christmas and I would stay with them for about a month. I used to look forward to going because they were nice. They were good Catholics. A couple of their kids were around my age so I played with them sometimes. They would take me to the beach with them. I was being used as well so it suited them to take me.

Healthcare

25. I can't remember getting any healthcare. I think they had nurses on stand-by. Some of the girls had polio. I can't remember ever being sick. We got a dental check-up once a year when the dentist would come to Nazzi.

Religious instruction

26. We prayed all day on a Sunday except for meal times. It was the Lord's Day. We always prayed before meals and had to kneel beside our beds and say our prayers. They were a bunch of hypocrites.

Christmas and Birthdays

27. Christmas was rubbish in Nazareth House. I wouldn't even describe it as Christmas. It was all prayers. I can't even remember seeing a Christmas tree but they would have had one in the front entrance for visitors. We weren't allowed in there. I can't remember getting any presents from the nuns other than a smack on the mouth. I wouldn't know anything about my birthday. They didn't celebrate anything.
28. We wore dresses and bloomers. We wore our 'Sunday best' for church. We would only get new clothes if we were going somewhere. You might get a new dress or a skirt for going to stay with people.

Visitors

29. I didn't have any visits from anyone personally. None of the girls had any visitors through the year. We only saw nuns and priests. The priests knew what was going on. They didn't say or do anything to stop it. We didn't know anything about what was going on, we just knew we were there. We got three meals a day, a whack every now and then and told how rotten we were for being orphans. It was like jail.

Personal Possessions

30. I didn't have any possessions or anything of my own. They gave us our clothes and toothbrushes but we didn't have anything of our own, not even a toilet bag.

Discipline

31. Beatings were regular. You would think you were being singled out. It happened at least three or four times a week and it could be for different things. I mainly copped the belt. It could be different nuns hitting you. They had no patience. They were violent bullies.

Sisters LSV and LSW

32. LSV and LSW were the nastiest. LSV was mainly in the school. She would turn on her heels and whack you. If you talked in class, she turned and whacked you. LSW seemed to be everywhere, in the dining room, the laundry, or the kitchen, so she had plenty of opportunity to whack us. LSW was tiny but a real bitch. She was in her forties. LSV was a fatter one about fifty. We were hit if we spoke when we should have been working, or hadn't done something properly. They just loved whacking us. It was just the normal thing.
33. I can't remember some things, I think because, if you opened your mouth you got a belting so things don't come easily to me now. I can still remember a lot of horrible things. They were not gentle, they were brutes. They always used something to hit us, either the belt or the stick. They used to wear a long, white robe with a bit over the front. They had their hands under there all the time so you knew when they brought them out that they were going to hit you. They had belts hanging from their robes. You saw it coming. They brought them out from underneath and hit you wherever it landed. LSV would turn on her heels, bring her belt or stick down and whack you.
34. The beatings got worse over time. I saw it happening to everyone. I seemed to have got it an awful lot. I felt I had a hard time but some of the girls got even harder times. My friend, [REDACTED] had a very hard time because she was pretty. The nuns didn't like her.

35. We were made to feel like we were nothing and told we were ungrateful. They just put us down. They never had a kind word for us. "Sisters of Nazareth", well, they showed us no compassion.
36. I didn't mind Sister MEJ [REDACTED]. She was never horrible to me. She was nice to a lot of the girls. At night she used to sneak the biscuit tin in for the girls and we would share them. She did whack you sometimes if you had done something wrong but she wasn't a nasty person.

Abuse at Nazareth House, Camberwell

37. On the way home from school, some of the other girls and I would go walk through Highfield Park to get back to Camberwell. One day we met some boys from another college and were talking to them. We were caught by someone who reported us to the nuns. When we got back, we were taken upstairs. We were taken into a room one by one and searched. I was given an internal examination by Doctor LSY [REDACTED] to check my virginity. There was a priest and a nun there too. It was LSW [REDACTED] or Elizabeth. They thought I'd had sex with one of the boys. I mean it was the middle of the day.
38. It was the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me being searched in front of a priest, a nun and a doctor. I have never recovered from that assault. I hadn't done anything wrong. I was belted for about a week afterwards. I was taken out of the school and for a while I had nothing to do except cleaning.
39. They ended up getting me a job in the Immigration Centre. I don't think I even got paid because I never had any money of my own. It must have been given directly to the nuns.
40. The name calling from the nuns was degrading and at the time we couldn't do anything about it. There wasn't anybody who we could speak to about it. We couldn't tell anybody. We were made to feel like we were nothing and that they were doing us a favour. We were "ungrateful bitches", "horrible and nasty". They would say "no wonder your mothers didn't want you". They threw things in our face the whole time. They never

had a kind word for us. Looking back, 'the Sisters of Nazareth', compassion, well, they never showed us any compassion. There was nobody to speak to or on our side.

41. I spent five years believing I had nothing and no family. The nuns told us we were lucky to be there because we were orphans. That was how we were brought up believing we were orphans. They just kept telling us we were lucky we had them because they were feeding us as our parents were dead. We were only kids and they made us feel like rotten scoundrels.
42. They were being paid by the government so they loved it. The government didn't interfere, nobody from the welfare department came to visit us or ask us how we were. Nobody worried about whether we were being treated well, nobody bothered to ask.
43. They used to send girls to a place called Abbotsford Convent if you were really bad. It was a threat and a punishment. They'd send girls there to be punished and they would come back like zombies. I always prayed I was never sent there. They would come back destroyed, mentally and physically, you wouldn't even know them. I was terribly lucky I wasn't sent there.

Leaving Nazareth House

44. The nuns told me I was leaving. They just got rid of us. We had nothing but I was glad to get out of there. I went to stay with the Dybings family. I was fifteen. The nuns would have organised it. I think they were quite happy to have me but they were Catholic so they probably felt they couldn't say no.
45. I was like a house cleaner while I boarded with them. They were good to me and didn't throw insults at me. I was quite happy to do the work because I wasn't being verbally or physically abused and I was out of the jail house. The work wasn't as bad there either because Nazareth House was huge.

Life after the institution

46. I boarded with them for a while, maybe a year. We had some happy times. I still worked in the Immigration Centre in the city. There were rows and rows of us in the typing pool. The supervisor used to thump me for talking when she walked past, she was a bitch. It was a bit like being back in the convent. In those days people could do what they liked.
47. My friend and I wanted to get a flat together. I just left the family and walked out. We got a flat in Elwood when I was fifteen or sixteen. From then on we were just our own people and lived our own lives.
48. As soon as I left, I hit the bottle. I was drinking like a fish. I would go in to work drunk or with a hangover. I didn't care about food. I just wanted cigarettes and booze, they were the only things I wanted. Drinking was the only thing that kept me sane. I wanted to do the things that I wasn't allowed in the home. We had no say in what we wore or what we ate, anything. I could do my own thing and I knew I wouldn't get a whack for it. I just took a liking to alcohol and thought I was going to have what I wanted. I was determined I was going to do my own thing.
49. I left the Immigration Centre after twelve to eighteen months and got a job as a typist in the railway. I would go in there with a hangover too. My friend and I moved to a boarding house because it was cheaper because we used to just drink our wages.
50. I met my husband. After a while, I became pregnant. We moved in with my mother-in-law when I was pregnant. When she found out I'd grown up in Nazareth House she changed towards me. She was beside herself because her son had married someone from an orphanage. She treated me like a piece of shit. We got our own house when my son was born.
51. I have three children. My son is 49, and my daughters are 46 and 42. I wasn't married for long. My ex-husband thought he was "god's gift to women". I was drinking heavily too so that didn't help. I brought the kids up myself. I've had different jobs such as

working in a factory and doing night shifts so that I would be there for the kids in the morning.

52. I worked until I became very ill with alcohol poisoning. After that I had to stop drinking. I was 54. My son was in his twenties by then. The kids forgave me for my drinking. They know all about me and have been so supportive. I see them all the time. I've had a couple of relationships since I separated from my ex-husband but I'm not interested. I like being on my own.

Other action taken

53. I have never reported anything to the police. I was too embarrassed for years and years. I wouldn't even talk about it. It was the worst thing that could have happened.

Treatment/support

54. I haven't had any treatment or counselling for being in an orphanage. A lot of my friends still don't even know. The only support I've had is from Child Migrants Trust. I became involved with them a long time ago. We have special days here and it's packed with people. We just talk to each other people about their lives.

Records and family tracing

55. I've never seen my records. **LST** and I went to the library in the city centre but couldn't find anything. I would like to see them one day.
56. My sister **LST** got a phone call out of the blue telling her about our family in Scotland. We found out that we have four brothers and two sisters. I nearly dropped everything because I didn't know. I had a family of my own by then. It was a shock because all my life I thought I was an orphan. **LST** won money and was able to go to Scotland to meet our mother. I couldn't afford to go so I never met her.
57. I went over when one of my nephews died to attend his funeral. It was a sad occasion but I wanted to meet the family. We all look alike, there's no mistaking us. I've met

cousins, nieces and nephews. We have a huge family in [REDACTED]. A couple of my brothers have been over to Australia with their wives. I don't think any of them will come over again. It's been difficult because the rest of the family are upset that we've delved into history. I think they were shocked to find out about us. They didn't even know who we were and I doubt if my mother ever spoke to them about us. They won't tell us anything about our mother. I think, to them, our mother was a saint. She couldn't do anything wrong. LST looks very like our mother. I have one photo of her and she was the image of her.

58. I don't know my father's name. When we were last there four years ago, we asked our brothers and sisters but they said they don't know. If they did know, they weren't going to tell us.

Other matters relating to migration

59. I was naturalised years ago. I receive a commonwealth pension. I've never had monetary compensation. I had a firm of solicitors who were going to work on our behalf but I haven't heard from them so I don't know what is going on. I've worked for everything I have, which isn't much but I've always worked.

Impact

60. I was really ill from not eating a couple of months ago. They put me in a mental hospital. I was locked in a room with other people who were screaming and yelling. I had gone to see the doctor and told her I was having problems with my stomach and not eating. She told me that a counsellor would speak to me. The counsellor spoke to me and said they would put me in hospital for a couple of days. I ended up in there for two weeks so that I would eat. I had no idea that's where I was going, it was a mental facility. I was beside myself. They told me that I have an eating disorder because I wasn't eating. I tried to tell me that I didn't belong in there.
61. I tried to run away. I was stuck in a room with another woman who was throwing her food everywhere. I was shocked. I never saw a doctor apart from the first day. I kept trying to explain that I didn't need to be there and that I wasn't mental. I had to do all

these silly little puzzle games. I was furious. I told the kids not to come to see me. It wasn't any good. I didn't get any counselling.

62. I don't trust people. I'm loud. I say what I want and if it's not right, I don't give a shit because I put up with it for years. I was shut up for so long. I hate people telling me what to do, I can't stand it. I can get very angry quickly. To me it's just getting back at the world for how I was treated when I was young. That's why I love living on my own. I see my kids and that's all I care about in life.
63. I was ashamed that I didn't have parents. I would be so embarrassed filling out forms and having to state "Nazareth House" on them. I would tell lies and say that I was in a boarding school because my parents died in a car accident. I used to work with a girl whose parents used to spoil her rotten. One day she came into work and started speaking badly about them. I had an argument with her and told her she should be grateful she had parents. I said she didn't know how lucky she was.

Lessons to be learned

64. I don't think it would happen now. They don't have orphanages or nuns now. I don't think they take children off of their parents and put them in an orphanage now. Things are different now.
65. When the truth came out, I couldn't believe that the nuns got away with it for so long. I wondered how we survived.

Final thoughts

66. 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.

LSU

Signed.

Dated

20-3-19