

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MKM

Support person present: No

1. My name is MKM. My date of birth is 1957. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was brought up in the Possilpark area of Glasgow. I lived in a two bedroomed tenement along with my four sisters and two brothers. In order of age there was myself, and
3. Possilpark was and still is a deprived area of Glasgow. Like many of our neighbours my parents struggled financially. Their income to the family came from what was known then as family allowance and my father's war pension. It was a case of what we never had we never missed. The most important thing was that we were all in good health and happy.
4. Unfortunately the good health did not apply to my father. He was invalided out of the army after being caught in an explosion whilst serving in France. The serious head injury he received meant he was never able to hold down a job. As a result of 23 invasive surgical procedures he was left bed ridden and paralysed from the waist down. In 1973 my father died aged fifty.

5. During the time my father was confined to bed I would often take a day off school. This was to help with his care and do various household chores. I would also run errands for my mother. This flexibility towards school led to social services becoming involved. I appeared at the Juvenile Court in Glasgow. They recommended that I should be sent straight to St Ninian's School at Falkland in Fife. I saw this more as a respite for my mother rather than a punishment for truancy. I remember that was how it was put to me. I was eleven years old. I had never even been outside of Possilpark.

St Ninians School, Falkland, Fife

Background

6. I was told that St Ninian's was not like an approved school. It was more of a residential school for boys who came from families with problems. That part was certainly true. Most of the boys at the school did have problems with their families. This could be for a variety of reasons. It might have been that parents were not able to cope, had been abusive or were alcoholics. Some of the boys had no family to speak of.
7. The thing that stood out for me at the school was that none of the boys were what I would call 'bad boys'. When I arrived I instantly made new friends and quickly settled in.
8. There were between thirty and forty boys at the home. They were aged between six and fifteen.
9. There were two groups, juniors and seniors. I think there were twelve to fourteen rooms for the juniors and six rooms for the seniors. Each room slept to boys. This was a positive. I had come from a two bedroomed flat with nine of us living there.

Christian Brothers

10. The Christian brothers ran the school. Brothers would come and go at the school. You were never sure if they were joining on a permanent basis or just visiting. Brother **LHC** I assumed was the [REDACTED] He was very old and frail. I remember him being a sort of semi-retired brother. Brother **BHD** was the [REDACTED] Brother **LNA** was [REDACTED] **BHD** The rest of the permanent brothers that I remember were Brother **LHI**, Brother **LMZ** Brother **MCY** and Brother **MBV**
11. Most of the brothers were chain smokers. They were rarely seen without a cigarette in their hand.
12. Brother **BHD** was a cruel and sadistic man. He had an air of violence and menace about him. All the boys knew not to get on his bad side. You didn't want to cross him. Hindsight being what it is he was a man who should never have been allowed near children. Brother **BHD** inflicted more abuse on me than the other brothers combined.
13. I had a good relationship with Brother **LNA** Brother **LNA** also had a bit of a temper on him. There was the odd occasion when I would be on the receiving end of a good slap from him. He would dish out punishments but without the malevolence of Brother **BHD**
14. Brother **LHC** would sometimes cover and supervise the mealtimes. I remember him being a very likeable man. He was quiet and had a mild tone of voice. I never once saw Brother **LHC** punish any of the boys.
15. All the Brothers were a mixture of Irish and English. These men seemed to have a dislike of all things Glaswegian. Name calling was open and commonplace. We would be called street urchins and tenement scum. There were frequent references made about the failure of our parents to provide for us. It often felt like that they were trying to break our spirits.

16. The Christian Brothers were abusive towards the children in their care. Of that there should be no doubt. I was the victim of their rage on more than one occasion.

Staff

17. There was also a number of lay staff at the school. The lay staff worked nine to five and most of them lived in the nearby Falkland village. Some of the staff had their own rooms and stayed at the school.
18. [REDACTED] MCS had the title of House Master. He had his own room. Cathie, I don't know her surname, was the housemaid for the brothers. Mr [REDACTED] BHB was a teacher and lived in the village. Maurice was the groundskeeper and maintenance man. He was also in charge of the boiler room. Maurice's wife was the seamstress. She also acted as matron until this position was filled. The lady who took the role of matron was Irish but I don't remember her name. Lizzie worked in the kitchen and was the cook. Lizzie also had an assistant until she left. After this Lizzie's daughter would help her.
19. The matron was like a ghost. She had a permanent scowl and never smiled. You would spot her sometimes coming out of her room or drifting down to the main hall. The matron never interacted with any of the boys.
20. [REDACTED] MCS was from Buckhaven in Fife. He was in his early twenties. I don't know what connection [REDACTED] MCS had with the Brothers. When I first met him he was an [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] By the time I left he had a room next to the junior classroom and was calling himself a House Master. His main duties seemed to be driving the minibus. I never really liked the guy. There was something about him which just did not feel right. He tried too hard to be a friend to the boys.
21. I think that Cathie was originally from Bellshill in Glasgow. She lived in Falkland. I assumed that she was a cleaner and housemaid. Whatever it was she was there for the benefit of the Brothers not the pupils. She very rarely interacted with the boys

and kept herself to herself. She spent most of her time in her room next to the kitchen.

22. Mr BHB was apparently a well-respected figure in the village. I doubt that the villagers were aware that inflicting pain on children gave him great pleasure. In the brutality stakes he ran a close second to Brother BHD
23. The groundskeeper, Maurice, and his wife lived in Falkland. Maurice was another who very rarely interacted with the boys. I do remember that his wife was very friendly.
24. Lizzie, the cook, was also very friendly. She was well liked and respected by all the boys.

Routine at St Ninians

25. Although I said that I settled in quickly when I first arrived I did cry non-stop for days. I had never been away from my family or stayed anywhere other than Possilpark. There was no counselling or comfort from the brothers. They never spoke about my family. It was the other kids who helped me when I first arrived.

Mornings and bedtime

26. Every morning I had to get up at six o'clock. You had your work to do before breakfast.
27. At night all the juniors went to bed at nine. The seniors were allowed to stay up later. They were basically looking after the home whilst the brothers were drinking in their rooms.

Mealtimes

28. The food was very good. I had come from a home where there was very little. This was completely different. In the home you were getting three meals a day. If someone didn't eat their food then the other boys would eat it. I don't remember any punishments for not eating your meals.

School

29. School started at eight. After lunch I was back in class until four. After this you had to stay in the class and do homework until six.
30. Brother [BHD] taught [REDACTED]. He was famous for throwing things at those who upset him. It could be anything chalk, chalk duster, rulers and pencils. He was also very proud of his hand made strap. These straps, although perfectly legal at that time, were instruments of torture.
31. Brother [LNA] taught [REDACTED].
32. Brother [LHI] was a [REDACTED] teacher. He also played the guitar. He wasn't one for inflicting physical punishments himself. If you did something wrong you would be sent to Brother [BHD] or Mr [BHB] to be punished.
33. Brother [LMZ] was our [REDACTED] teacher. He also seemed to find the physical punishments distasteful. Like a lot of the other brothers Brother [LMZ] seemed to be fond of the younger boys.
34. Mr [BHB] taught, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. On one occasion I was collecting tuck money in the class. This was for an African charity. Mr [BHB] came into the classroom and saw what I was doing. He started screaming at me. I was then made to stand with my hands crossed. After this I was belted on the hands until I cried.

Christmas and birthdays

35. I was allowed to return home for a week at Christmas. My birthday was never celebrated.

Leisure

36. You had a bit of time to yourself after classes.

Work

37. The boys were assigned separate parts of the house to clean. This was called a charge. About eighty percent of the cleaning in the house was done by the boys. My first charge was the main hall. Myself and another boy would dip cloths into tins of wax floor polish. We would then go on our hands and knees to rub the highly polished floors. After this other boys would come behind us to bring the sheen out using a buffer machine.
38. I was later moved to the showers to keep these clean. I thought I had won the pools. It was much easier than being in the main hall. I would wash down the cubicles and replace the soap. I had to do this job in the morning before breakfast.
39. Strangely half the jobs assigned to the boys were used as punishments for misbehaviour. This could be clearing the blocked drains in the showers, weeding the cobbled courtyard and mopping the basement corridors.

Visits

40. Occasionally I was allowed home on weekend leave. I also had two weeks back home during the summer.

Discipline

41. Aside from the unwarranted and unexpected violence inflicted on the pupils there were a number of expected punishments. These would be for disobedience, impudence and smoking. If you did any of these it would lead to loss of tuck, no television, no free time, early bedtime, no outings, extra chores, isolation in the main hall or long runs in the country. Isolation in the main hall meant standing against the main wall for hours. The long runs in the country would be given to everyone even if they had disabilities.
42. Another punishment was being made to clean the weeds from between the cobbles. You were given a knife and had to scrape the weeds out into a bucket. To do this job you had to go on your hands and knees.

Bed Wetting

43. If someone wet the bed Brother [REDACTED] BHD would make them put their mattresses on display to openly humiliate them.

Running away

44. I ran away once. I was away for a day. When I was caught and taken back I was belted by Brother [REDACTED] BHD I was made to stand in the main hall for hours. Every time [REDACTED] BHD went past he would slap me on the face. I was eventually sent to bed. My tuck was taken away as well.

Other information

45. All of us senior boys knew that the behaviour of the Brother's was inappropriate. However their behaviour was not a subject we would dwell on. At that time we didn't understand what child abuse was. It is only now looking back you realise that young boys sitting on the brother's knees was inappropriate.

46. If we had any rights at St Ninian's no one ever told us what these were. As far as I know the running of the school was never questioned. An example of this was when a new junior committed suicide in his bedroom whilst he was on home leave. The boy was called [REDACTED] and aged about twelve. He lived a few streets from me at Possilpark in Glasgow. I don't remember anyone asking the Brothers or pupils what [REDACTED] state of mind had been when he was at the school. I found this quite disturbing. It felt like nobody really cared about what had driven this boy to suicide. I don't suppose we will ever know. I only found out he had died when one of the brothers mentioned it to us after our home leave. All they said was that he had died. It was later on I discovered it was actually suicide.

Abuse at St Ninian's

47. Abuse was prevalent at the school. I can assure you that actions carried out in the name of discipline would be viewed by the outside world as assaults and random acts of violence. How the day of a pupil went often depended on the mood of Brother [REDACTED] BHD

Brother [REDACTED] BHD

48. My most disturbing and painful moment came at the hands of Brother [REDACTED] BHD. One morning I was in the process of cleaning the showers. Brother [REDACTED] BHD came in. Without warning he came screaming at me. He said that I had missed a scrubbing brush from one of the cubicles. Brother [REDACTED] BHD proceeded to attack me. He hit me continuously with a long handled scrubbing brush that had been within one of the cubicles. It seemed to last an eternity. I truly believe that he only stopped because he became tired. When he was finished I was black and blue from head to toe. I was also bleeding. It was days before I had full mobility again.
49. It was a sad reality that all the adults in the school who saw my condition made no attempt to console me or enquire how I was. I wasn't offered and didn't receive any

medical attention for my injuries. It was down to the children to help me and provide some solace.

50. On another occasion Brother [BHD] was entering the senior sitting room as I was leaving. It was one of those awkward situations when you had to shuffle left and right to pass each other in the doorway. It should have been a funny moment. Instead, and without warning, Brother [BHD] punched me in the face. This knocked me off my feet. To me this was him establishing his self-importance and ensuring his God given right of way.
51. I would say that most of the boys in St Ninian's experienced, or at least witnessed, this irrational violent behaviour. We learned to say and question nothing. We were afraid to openly offer support to our classmates. This wasn't cowardly it was because we were only children.

Brother [LNA] and other unnamed Brothers

52. I always thought that Brother [LNA] and several other brothers were overly fond of the junior boys. When I was at the school I just thought that the boys were like the teachers pets. After lights out I would often see the junior pupils making their way to the common room used by the Brothers when they were supervising through the night. None of the seniors were ever asked to go to that room at night. Normally you would only go there to have minor injuries treated.

Brother [LHI]

53. Brother [LHI] had a habit of bouncing little boys on his lap. Again it is only with hindsight that I now realise how inappropriate this behaviour towards young boys was.

Reporting of abuse

54. I would never have mentioned any abuse to anyone whilst I was at the school. No one would ever have believed me. If someone independent had spoken with me I think I might have mentioned to them what had happened to me.

Leaving St Ninian's

55. I left St Ninian's when I was fifteen. This was the year before the school leaving age changed to sixteen. There was no preparation for me leaving. I just left without any qualifications. My time at the home had certainly not stood me in good stead for the rest of my life.
56. There was a lot about St Ninian's that I had liked. Things like having clean pyjamas and a room of your own was good. Despite all this I was glad to leave. I think I chose not to remember a lot of the dark things.

Life after care

57. My father died a year after I left St Ninian's. I started working at the fruit market in Glasgow. After this I did various labouring jobs. I struggled to hold down a job until I started working at the [REDACTED] in Glasgow. I worked there for around nine years. I began as a stage hand and worked my way up to stage manager. During this time I was married and had three children.
58. In 1982 I got a job with the railways. worked there for 34 years. I educated myself and managed to obtain a degree along with various HND and HNC qualifications. This allowed me to gain various promotions. When I retired from the railways I was head of safety.

59. I moved to Florida and started my own business there. I also undertake contract work as a safety consultant in the UK.

Impact

60. I wouldn't say that my time in care had any impact on my life as an adult. I tried not to let it affect me. I would never say St Ninian's shaped me. It was my family that did this.
61. Earlier in adult life I was a member of the Children's Panel in Ayrshire. I wanted to make a difference. I wouldn't have done this if I hadn't been through what I had at St Ninian's.

Records

62. I have never thought about accessing my records. I don't think there would be anything recorded about my time there and what I suffered.

Lessons to be Learned

63. I know that Brother [REDACTED] BHD has passed away. I also know that the Congregation of Christian Brothers have lost all credibility and trust when it comes to caring for children. They failed all the children who were in their care institutions throughout the world.
64. It makes me sad that an important time in my life, and the life's of many others, was affected by the abuse they suffered whilst in care. It makes me even sadder to read of care givers, especially religious orders, denying that these things ever happened. I know it did because I experienced it at first hand. This is yet another reason that I am happy to have left the Catholic faith behind me.

65. I am sure that in the near future the Brotherhood will be consigned to history's bin of 'Good intentions gone wrong'. If that happens then it is good enough for me.

Hopes for the Inquiry

66. It seems that children have been abused in every care institution throughout the country. I hope that those who were abused achieve the justice that they seek. I also hope that by sharing my experiences it will ensure that we never allow the abuse in care, on the scale we are hearing of today, to ever happen again.
67. The organisations involved need to take ownership and responsibility for what happened. When I was put into care the court system got it wrong. Vulnerable children were put into care with the brothers who couldn't cope.

Other information

68. I was brought up that adults were always right. As a child I never attributed a sinister nature to the things I saw and the incidents of abuse I suffered. When I was in care I accepted their behaviour was normal. As an adult and with hindsight I can now see them for what they were. What they did was so very wrong.

Counselling

69. I think if I had been offered counselling when I first came out of care it would have helped. I don't need it now.

70. 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.

MKM

Signed.....

Dated..... 05 April 2019.....