

**Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

ABR

Support person present: No

1. My name is [REDACTED] ABR [REDACTED] My maiden name is [REDACTED] My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1948. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. I'm speaking to the Inquiry about my father, [REDACTED] AHI [REDACTED] I always called him [REDACTED] AHI [REDACTED]

**Life before going into care**

2. As a child [REDACTED] AHI [REDACTED] lived in [REDACTED] He was one of three boys and there were three girls, six in total. Two girls died by the time they were five and the other girl lived on to marry and have family. [REDACTED] was the eldest (1899-1955), then [REDACTED] (1902-1907), [REDACTED] (1904-1936), [REDACTED] (1906-1907), my father (1908-1994) and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (1910- 1918).
3. Their father, [REDACTED] was a regular soldier. He had been a miner. I don't know if he went into the army in 1913 or 1914. Their mother, very soon into the marriage, became an alcoholic. So I think [REDACTED] the father, tried his best to keep things going. When I went through their lives, every child was born in a different house. They must've been very poor and just moved from one place to another.
4. Their mother, because of the alcoholism, finally left them at some point, maybe 1913 or 1914. The eldest sister [REDACTED] tried to keep them but she couldn't. [REDACTED] their father, was away in the army. In those days there was no compassionate leave. She was only a young girl herself, she'd have been fifteen. [REDACTED] AHI [REDACTED] told me there was no fire in the house and it was cold. [REDACTED] was trying to get food for them. [REDACTED] was put

into service. The authorities came and put the three boys into Smyllum. He was six. He said, "People took them away".

5. I call [REDACTED] because he was born, and his birth was registered, as [REDACTED] but his death was registered at Smyllum as being [REDACTED]. He was baptised as [REDACTED] because the Catholic Church in those days didn't recognise names unless they were Christian names. When he died at Smyllum, in all probability they didn't have his birth certificate. [REDACTED] died in 1918 when he was eight. The nuns must have gone to the church in Blantyre, St Josephs, to find out what he was baptised as. I don't know what they called him while he was there.

### **Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark**

6. I don't know when exactly they went into Smyllum or when they came out but it would be 1918 at some time.
7. [REDACTED] AHI said it was a terrible, grim place. At that time children lived in a poor situation, so they had a much greater acceptance of bad conditions. The difference was, they weren't well treated, where they had never known that at home. They'd never known abuse at home.
8. You had to read between the lines. I can just see him sitting there, putting his hand on his face, saying , "Oh, it was a terrible, terrible grim place." So you took what you wanted from that.
9. [REDACTED] AHI said that [REDACTED] tried to look after them. From what he said, [REDACTED] was very quiet. [REDACTED] was younger and cried all the time. He wanted his dad to come home. They didn't miss their mother .
10. [REDACTED] became ill and was sick. He was waiting for his daddy to come home. [REDACTED] AHI said [REDACTED] died of a broken heart because his daddy didn't come. That's not the case.

From the paperwork I have, [REDACTED] died in Smyllum, from the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919.

### *Visits*

11. The boys' sister, [REDACTED] was in service when they were in Smyllum. She got one day off a month and she visited them .
12. A lady called [REDACTED] came to me later on. [REDACTED] had gone to Smyllum as a teenager, with her mother, to visit [REDACTED] AHI and his two brothers. Her mother possibly knew [REDACTED] the father. She said they pleaded with her, "Take us home with you".
13. There was a war on for most of the time they were in Smyllum and their father was in the army in Ireland for some of the time. I don't know how often he visited them but he visited at least once, as soon as he could after [REDACTED] died. I have one photograph of [REDACTED] the father, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] AHI altogether. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] AHI are wearing the Smyllum uniform.

### **Abuse at Smyllum**

14. [REDACTED] AHI had beatings on the head at Smyllum from one of the nuns. He said one was particularly nasty and hit him on the ears. It definitely happened there because the later family talked about it. It was spoken about in conversation at my grandparents' home. When [REDACTED] visited and when [REDACTED] visited, there would be talk of it. People didn't talk in front of children but you would glean things from the conversation.
15. He told me he was made deaf as a wee boy but you didn't start asking him questions because it was a sad part of his life.

16. The impression I had from [AHI] was that there was no affection at Smyllum. At the end of his life [AHI] had to go into [redacted] Nursing Home in [redacted]. There was a nurse there called Helen who took a great deal of time with him. He said to me, "I'm going to call Helen, Sister Helen because the only nun who was kind to me at Smyllum was Sister Helen".

### Life after being in care

17. My grandfather came out of the army and secured a house in Greenock. He brought [redacted] and [AHI] to live with him in Greenock. My grandfather worked for the Board of Trade. He was a very good father. [redacted] was married and didn't live with them.
18. [AHI] must've been educated because he wrote beautifully and he was good with numbers. He always read books and newspapers.
19. Both [AHI] and his brother [redacted] served an apprenticeship in the shipyards in Greenock. After that [redacted] went into the army.
20. For the duration of the war, [AHI] worked as an asphalt boiler man on roadworks all over the country. [AHI] stayed with his father until his father died, in 1932. Then he came to stay in Stonehouse with his sister, [redacted]
21. [redacted] was discharged from the army because he had cancer. [AHI] rented a wee flat and nursed him til he died. After that he went to lodge in Larkhall with his friends [redacted]
22. [AHI] met my mother in 1946. My mother had been married briefly and had a daughter, [redacted]. They married in 1947.
23. He trained as a mechanic in a fibreglass factory and worked there until they closed. Then he went to work at the [redacted] [AHI] trained as a

spray painter there and was in charge of the paint shop. He worked there until he was 67. After that he went on to work part-time with my uncle [REDACTED] in a factory until he was 69. He spray painted old machinery being overhauled to be sent to third world countries.

## Impact

24. I had a wonderful relationship with my father. He was a very affectionate person, which is surprising from being in care. He was a kind person, a nice person. He and I were extremely close. He wouldn't have told you things that upset you. My mum worked on a Saturday so we spent a lot of time together at the weekend, maybe more than young people do. We were great friends together. One time I asked him, "Would it be ok if I called you [REDACTED] AHI?". He said, "Of course [REDACTED] ABR of course!". I called him [REDACTED] AHI after that.
25. When I got married, I was loath to leave him but we saw him all the time. He was up at my house all the time. My dad and mum went a lot of holidays to Canada to see my sister. We had a nice family. [REDACTED] AHI always did his best to do the right thing.
26. [REDACTED] AHI had a wonderful relationship with my sister, [REDACTED]. When mum said to her that she was going to get married to [REDACTED] AHI she said, "Oh that's good because I'll have somebody for both hands now". She and [REDACTED] AHI got on very well all her life. She called her son after him. [REDACTED] emigrated to Canada and [REDACTED] AHI visited her there.
27. My gran, my mothers' mother, became as if she was [REDACTED] AHI mother. My grandparents thought [REDACTED] AHI was wonderful. He had good relationships with older ladies. He was very fond of [REDACTED] who'd visited him in Smyllum. She carried on visiting him and came to our house when I was wee. Two older ladies from Greenock came to his funeral.
28. As a result of the beatings at Smyllum, [REDACTED] AHI was very, very deaf. He had hearing aids all his life. I remember him going into the Murray Royal in Glasgow to see if

there was anything they could do but they couldn't because both his ears had been punctured.

29. I don't know how he managed. He would only hear a person who was close to him. If anyone else started to speak, he couldn't differentiate between all these voices, especially in a big company. It was just a babble.
30. Both AHI and [REDACTED] were to be going into the army, that's what the family did. He didn't get in because he was so deaf. He tried again in 1939 but same thing, he was refused. Lots of chances he could have had in life, he didn't have, because of his hearing.
31. AHI had an industrial accident, when he worked at the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] because he couldn't hear. He saw two or three men manoeuvring a machine onto a table and when someone said, "Right", he didn't take his hands away. His fingers were in a terrible state for years.
32. He was a very religious man. AHI gave a lot of money to the Catholic missions. Whenever he met a nun, he put his hand in his pocket. I give money to the nuns, you can't stop it, it's part of you. There's a lovely wee nun from Sisters of Nazareth who sits in Hamilton and I give money to her. She's a wee old lady. She doesn't ask anyone for anything but it's surprising the number of people who talk to her.
33. AHI had no sympathy with himself and it manifested as, "I will have to work hard, to have a job". He didn't sit and wait for people to give him things, he got on with it.
34. I didn't realise the difference between my father and my mothers' upbringing until I was much older. I just thought everyone had been brought up the way my mother was brought up.
35. Until it came out that there was a mass grave for the children at Smyllum, I never gave a thought to the fact that there wasn't some sort of structure for the children's burial. I'm glad AHI was dead by that time. When we were in the car, going

through Lanark, up past the cemetery, on the main road. AHI used to say, "Our wee [REDACTED] in there". He thought [REDACTED] was in the cemetery. He never said he wanted to go down there and see if he could find him. It wouldn't be a memory he'd want to bring up.

36. In the cemetery at Lanark, there are lots of graves of nuns and priests. There must've been priests coming from here, there and everywhere. They couldn't have all been in Lanark. The headstones are new.
37. I've been to where I think the children are. I don't know where the children are buried, there's nothing to tell you. I've been to the Smyllum memorial, the nuns paid for it. I think it's totally inappropriate for them to talk about the children who never went home
38. They must have had plans. You can't just bury 400 in a field. They must've known where they'd already buried. It's inconceivable to say you don't have plans. You couldn't possibly bury people without plans and the dates you buried them.
39. The nuns would be given money, either through a government or council grant. They didn't take your children out of the goodness of their heart, they were paid for that. They must've had to tell the authorities when the children arrived and when they departed. Be it back to their parents, or to bury them. Information is there somewhere. They would be claiming for each child. Their funeral would need to be paid for.
40. [REDACTED] never married. I don't think AHI would have married, if it hadn't been that he'd known my mother since they were teenagers. He was quiet and reserved and the fact he was deaf didn't help.
41. AHI didn't make friends casually but he made them well. His friendships were very close. [REDACTED] became like a brother to AHI right to the end of life.

42. The last thing on my fathers' mind would have been abusing anyone, he couldn't have. Being in Smyllum made him strive. He didn't speak about Smyllum a lot but when he did, you could see it in his eyes. It upset him. He never went back to see the place. I think he blotted a lot of it out.
43. I think having a good father to come back to, helped a lot. His sister [REDACTED] was lovely too.

### Records

44. I had real difficulty finding [REDACTED] death certificate because he was registered as [REDACTED]
45. I phoned the Sisters of Charity in London and got no information at all. I wanted to know where [REDACTED] was buried and whether there were any dates they could have given me about the boys. They said, "We don't have any records, we can't tell you". There was something about a fire. They weren't prepared to disclose anything. I would have been prepared to pay any costs but the door was just closed.
46. I went to the Town House at Hamilton. The lady who looks after the historical records very kindly helped me find the microfiche records of the births and deaths of my fathers' brothers and sisters.

### Other information

47. They don't know how many children died at Smyllum. They only have the names of 150 children. I would like to add the names of the two that I know of, to the records. When I traced [REDACTED] death certificate, there is another child who died on the same day named next to him. They were both registered by Sister [REDACTED]



- 48. Were the children buried in a bit of sacking or a coffin? Who dug the grave? Where are they buried? It's not possible for the nuns to shut their eyes and say, "We don't know". The nuns' Orders did know. They should be made to tell. That's something the investigation needs to find out.
- 49. I want the world to know that we wouldn't let those things happen again.
- 50. As with other things in the Catholic Church, it's time they told the truth about what happened and not to hide things. I would like the Order to admit the things they've done.
- 51. I would like to think that the children who were in there, who are still alive, feel they have a worth in this life. Worth is taken away from you when you're treated like that.
- 52. 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.

ABR

Signed.....

Dated..... 20.12.14