

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

IBI

Support person present: No

1. My name is IBI My date of birth is 1971. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. This statement constitutes my addendum statement further to providing the Inquiry with my principal signed statement dated 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

### Further information on John Brownlee's behaviour

2. When I arrived at the Edinburgh Academy in the Summer Term of 1981, the other boys made very clear to me, on my first evening in Dundas House, that you had to be extremely careful around Mr Brownlee and his wife or you risked being punished. Later, I was given specific instruction by my fellow dorm-mates not to use the toilet on the first-floor landing in the middle of the night. As the toilet backed onto the Brownlee's bedroom, flushing the toilet would wake Mrs Brownlee and make her unhappy. That would result in the entire dorm being punished so instead, you had to hold it in until morning. Similarly, talking after lights out was forbidden. To do so risked a further brutal punishment. I soon learned that you walked past their bedroom door on the first-floor landing as quickly as you could in trepidation that it might open.
3. John Brownlee used fear and brutality to enforce his authority and he was prepared to intimidate and assault young boys to do so. His favorite instruments were the clacken, a table tennis bat and a pool cue. To keep discipline through prep he would occasionally slam the pool cue down on the table to frighten everyone. He would also use the pool cue on the banister of the stairs so the repetitive noise it made acted as a warning to those upstairs that he was coming.

4. Mr Brownlee also had this trick of grabbing your shirt collar with his fist and punching the back of your neck if he felt you were not standing up properly or your posture was poor. In addition, he would stand behind you during prep and if he felt you weren't paying sufficient attention to your homework, while verbally commenting on your general uselessness as a person, he would invade your personal space by putting his hands on your shoulders and would very roughly massage them. I loathed this punishment and to this day I will squirm with discomfort if anyone attempts to massage my shoulders. Thus a level of intimacy has been lost to me.
5. Mr Brownlee was a 47 year old well-built man and mature adult physically assaulting children of between 6 - 10 years old who, because of their small, immature stature, were not physically able to stand up to him and had no means of escape. His actions were designed to intimidate and establish a culture of fear. They went beyond corporal punishment into physical and psychological abuse.
6. Though my final year in Dundas House was ultimately happy, my fear of the Brownlees did not dissipate. As a result of the culture John Brownlee established, a general air of fear permeated Dundas House which was corrosive to our development and not the 'family friendly' environment the Edinburgh Academy promoted in the early 1980s.

### **The culture of the Edinburgh Academy Boarding Houses**

7. I now think that John Brownlee's abusive behaviour infected the entire culture of the Edinburgh Academy boarding houses, thereafter. This was a 'Lord of the Flies' culture, which prioritised conformity overall and promoted survival of the fittest. If someone was felt not conform or fit with the ideal promoted by that culture, they would be socially excluded or forced out of the group. This gave rise to a culture which promoted witch-hunts.
8. While I was in Scott House I read a book *'Life and Death in Shanghai'* by Nien Cheng a survivor of the Cultural Revolution in Mao Zedong's China. The book has haunted me since because I recognised in its description of Communist witch-hunts and the

damage they caused the similar behaviour I witnessed at the Edinburgh Academy boarding houses.

9. For example, in my second year at Mackenzie House there was an influx of new boys to the boarding house. One of these was from the Seychelles. He was different to the other boys because he was more prepared to express his feelings through hugging or touching people. Unfortunately, in the emotionally cold environment of the boarding house that was felt by many to be unwelcome and a threat.
10. At that time, I was becoming conscious of my sexuality and I realised I was attracted to him; however, I was only 12 so I did not know how to handle his advances and I felt threatened by them. The other new boys in our dorm became conscious of this and asked me if I thought he was gay. As I wasn't sure of what to do and being identified as gay would mean ostracism I took the coward's way out. I told them I thought he was and thus, with me in the role of Judas, the witch-hunt started which resulted in him being forced to leave after only a few months.
11. He was devastated and I now realise how deeply I hurt him with my betrayal. I bitterly regret this and still feel shame for my role in this for he had done nothing wrong. Alas, such was the dog-eat-dog culture of the place. I've always wondered what happened to him and if there was a way I could apologise, I would. I suppose the only consolation I can take is he didn't have to endure the toxic culture of the boarding house for long.
12. I am sure a similar culture infects many schools. However, the problem with being in a boarding house is there is no escape from it. It is not as if you can go home at the end of the day. Instead you must endure it and sadly that immersive culture of betrayal of others and yourself corrodes your soul.
13. In that toxic culture you soon learned what you must do in order to survive and, having seen how quickly the body politic in the boarding house ejected him on the suspicion of being gay, the lesson I learned was I had to conceal my sexuality at all costs. However, your sexuality is such a core part of who you are as a person so to deny and repress it means cutting yourself off from your emotions and learning not to express them. Ultimately that is damaging and you pay a price for that

concealment which gives rise to a secretive character and deep sense of shame I am still trying to overcome.

### **Life after boarding school continued**

14. In my original witness statement when describing my life in Hong Kong in my early twenties, what I omitted to mention was the reality of my early working life. I was based in a fashionable architectural practice run by a young architect who had worked on Norman Foster's Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Headquarters which was the world's most expensive building. Having decided to stay on he established a practice in Hong Kong and I was lucky enough to be offered a job there on the strength of my architectural portfolio. My boss was a character in his mid-thirties who liked to party and so his office was at the centre of Hong Kong's architectural social scene. One night my boss asked me if I was gay as, being bisexual, he'd figured it out from my demeanour as I was so unsure of myself. He then introduced me to Hong Kong's gay scene as he'd designed Hong Kong's first gay nightclub. This introduction turned out to be a double edged sword.
15. The gay scene can be a heartless and superficial place due to the value placed on image and desirability. Therefore, if you are unsure of yourself it can be damaging especially when you are lonely and looking for reassurance. As a result I was taken advantage of and wound up in a vicious circle of finding myself in the early evenings after work standing on the flat roof of our 24 storey office block staring at the Hong Kong skyline contemplating suicide before descending into Lan Kwai Fong, Hong Kong's nightclub district, to get drunk and hope to get picked up. Basically, I was looking for a way to fill the void as I felt so worthless. Sadly, I was looking for validation in all the wrong places. After a year of this unsafe lifestyle - of which I am not proud - I had a health scare and panicking sought an HIV test which fortunately proved negative. After that fright I came to my senses and I realised the risks I was taking.
16. Instead, after returning to Glasgow in the mid 1990s, I volunteered at the charity Scottish AIDS Monitor going out into Glasgow's Pubs and Clubs to tell people about safe sex. I also helped set up the Glasgow Gay Men's Chorus to help encourage

pride in the community and in myself as feelings of shame are never far away. Indeed, the fact that neither of these voluntary experiences make it onto my CV speaks volumes about the pervading sense of shame and fear of being identified as gay at the time - this was the era of Section 28. Fortunately, it was through this I found my partner and, despite my flaws resulting from my boarding school upbringing, we've been together ever since and he has supported me and provided a sanctuary to let me be myself.

### **Depression, Suicide attempts and counselling**

17. At paragraph 123 in my witness statement, I referred to the housemistress in Scott House arranging for me to go and see the doctor to talk about my depression. When my witness statement was prepared I had not seen my medical notes. Now that I have, I know that I did talk to the doctor because there is a typed record of our discussion in my medical notes. The discussion occurred on 23 March 1988 and refers to how I thought my depression was affecting my work. It also notes how I have on occasions contemplated suicide. I was 16 years old at the time. This is such a red flag I would very much like to know if the school was made aware of the doctor's concerns. Between 1991 and 1995 are a further series of letters between my doctor and a clinical psychologist about my unhappiness, resentment, anger and poor social skills because of the shame I felt over my sexuality. Ultimately, I was treated for clinical depression with Prozac in Spring of 1995, just at the point I should have been preparing for the end of my degree.

### **The impact on my family**

18. As a result of what has happened since autumn - specifically since Nicky Campbell's public revelation about witnessing abuse at the Edinburgh Academy - various family revelations have emerged. Not only has it come as a complete shock to hear my brother's account of what happened to him at the Edinburgh Academy, there have been conversations with my mother which have taken me aback or made me question assumptions. For years, both my parents have bitterly regretted sending

my brother and I to boarding school but this has only made things worse. My mother, who is 80 and shouldn't be having to endure this, has been so upset about what's emerged she couldn't sleep for weeks. My father, who is 81, is so furious with the Edinburgh Academy, he struggles to discuss it. Neither of my parents came from a boarding school background. Both of them trusted the Edinburgh Academy to look after their sons and they now feel betrayed and their trust in the school misplaced.

19. The first of these revelations is that when my parents were in Edinburgh on leave from Hong Kong in the late 1970s and going round schools to find the right one for their sons, they had an interview with James Burnet, the then headmaster of the Edinburgh Academy Preparatory school. My father had won a classics scholarship to the University of Glasgow so wanted a classical education for his sons hence my parents' interest in the Edinburgh Academy. At their interview, when Mr Burnet offered my parents a place for my older brother in the prep school there and then my mother interjected that my brother, who was 8, was too young to board and she'd rather wait until he was older. Mr Burnet, who was always friendly towards me, so I thought was a decent man, turned to my mother and said: *"I run a business. If I tell you that a place is available for your son, it is available now. It won't be available in the future.* Though my mother was most uncomfortable with this, she felt she had no choice if otherwise it meant her son would be rejected.
20. Therefore, it appears Mr Burnet manipulated or bounced my parents into a life choice which ultimately had major repercussions for my family. This suggests to me that at that time the Edinburgh Academy prioritised its business model and income over the welfare of the children being placed in its care. Sadly, this makes sense of what happened to me whereby the housemaster in Mackenzie House appears to have prioritised the reputation of the school - for it was the good reputation of the school which allowed them to attract new pupils and the income from the fees they would bring - over my welfare as a child. My reason for thinking this is a sexual assault by an older pupil on a younger pupil, who was a child, could have exposed them to oversight from social services. The negative publicity would have been disastrous for the school hence why what happened to me was not reported to my parents as it should have been.

21. The second of these revelations happened as I was leaving the Academy in 198█  
As part of the leaving ceremony there was a leavers lunch to which both teachers and parents invited. My parents were at a table with both Tony Cook, a former teacher and current President of the Edinburgh Academical Club, and his wife, Jenny Cook. I liked both Mr and Mrs Cook. Mr Cook was an inspirational biology teacher who helped make the subject one of my favourites. Mrs Cook was known for her plain speaking and gregariousness. I do not wish them any ill but it is important to set the record straight.
  
22. During that lunch my mother remembers how Mrs Cook turned to her and asked how she could have "*sent her sons to Dundas House as everyone knew what the Brownlees were like*". My mother was shocked and asked Mrs Cook what she meant but before she could explain Mr Cook steered the conversation into safer waters. My mother was too polite to insist on a response. After the lunch my mother says she asked me what Mrs Cook could have meant about the Brownlees but I refused to discuss the matter. Therefore, as this came from the wife of one of the teachers in the senior school, it now seems apparent to us as a family that John Brownlee's abusive behaviour towards the boys in his care was common knowledge amongst the Edinburgh Academy community.

### **The impact of the Edinburgh Academy on me**

23. I now recognise how much my experience at the Edinburgh Academy shaped me as a person. Having now reread my school reports I can see how much my experiences in both the Art and Biology labs influenced my direction in life. I realise that the opportunity to draw, observe and learn about Edinburgh en plein air informed my thinking about cities, urbanism and love of architecture, communities and people in the same way that I learnt about how cities work from my upbringing in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, there is a flaw which runs right through my development as a person which starts in Dundas House. That flaw renders the whole damaged and incomplete.

24. What I learned through my experiences at Dundas House and the first two years of Mackenzie House has had an impact on my life and career thereafter. Rather than prepare me for the slings and arrows of life that experience left me with a fragile sense of self-confidence, low self-worth and deep sense of shame. Therefore, every time I encountered a bully in either my student or professional career, I shut down emotionally and go into survival mode. That manifests itself in being taken advantage of and being walked all over because I find myself unable to say no. I therefore find myself submitting to situations in the workplace no one else would have the patience to tolerate. That is a direct result of the nine months of psychological, physical, emotional and sexual abuse from my bully which I quietly endured back in the Geits at the Edinburgh Academy because I did not know who I could turn to for help.
25. Worse, instead of providing safeguarding, it was the Edinburgh Academy who put me in harms way. Thanks to his physical assault on me in the autumn term of 198█, I was transferred out of the dorm I had shared with my bully and into another dorm for my protection as we were clearly incompatible i.e. the staff in Dundas House recognised there was a safeguarding issue and acted to protect me. However, when we were moved up to Mackenzie House, when we started at the Edinburgh Academy senior school in Autumn of 198█, there doesn't seem to have been a handover in terms of safeguarding. If there had been, the staff in Mackenzie House would have known that placing me in the same dorm as my bully would put me at risk. Instead, by putting us back in the same dorm, they left me unprotected and vulnerable to a nine month long campaign of bullying which culminated in me being sexually assaulted. As the bullying was happening within the dorm and out of sight of the staff, it wasn't until I broke down under the strain that the situation became obvious to them. However, by then it was too late for me and as a result this did significant psychological damage to me at a formative age.
26. Perhaps if the school had given me the support I needed then, instead of sweeping it under the carpet to protect its reputation, things would have turned out differently for me. For instance, considering the fees they paid for what they thought would be an excellent education, how is it a good outcome for parents if their son, based on their formative experiences at the Edinburgh Academy which included a nasty sexual assault, decides they will never have children? My parents remain unaware of the



decision I made back in 1982. They will never know the joy of a grandchild from me. My partner, who is a number of years older than me, finds it deeply upsetting, for he fears I will be left on my own to face a lonely old age. As such, I firmly believe the Edinburgh Academy owes me, my brother, my parents and my partner an apology for what happened due to a lack of safeguarding while we were in their care.

27. Finally, I am aware that my brother in giving his witness statement accidentally revealed the name of my bully. Therefore, I want to make clear that I have no intention of naming my bully or taking action against him. As I said when giving my witness statement, having seen his comments about the Edinburgh Academy on Facebook, I suspect he may have been just as much of a victim as I was. Also, I am now aware that he was in Hamish Dawson's class when he was in the Geits so had also been exposed to the worst aspects of the school. That said he did have a choice insofar as he didn't have to take out whatever happened to him on me. Nevertheless, he was a child at the time and he now has a wife and family who are blameless but could also be drawn into this. As such, I believe there is little to be gained from naming him other than revenge which I am not interested in.
28. 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.....  
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IBI  
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Dated..... 27 July 2023 .....