

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

James Doherty

Support person present: No

1. My name is James Doherty and my date of birth is [REDACTED] 1948. I am 69 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. I am now retired having previously worked as a demolisher. I have been married to my wife, [REDACTED] for fifty years and we have four sons. My parents were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
3. We stayed in Shettleston in Glasgow till I was seven then moved to Garthamlock. This was a new place that had no shops, no schools and was all mud. They were still building houses there ten years later. We all had to get a bus to school.

Life before care

4. We weren't well off and my father lost his job after he broke his back at work. He got no compensation after losing his job. He never worked again and died at the age of 61. Mum was a devout Catholic. We might not have been well off but we were a nice family. My grandfather took unwell and my mum was travelling a lot between his house and ours. He lived till he was 90.

5. I was alright in primary school but didn't like secondary and started playing truant. I got into trouble and was eventually arrested for stealing lead from the roofs. I was sent to Glasgow sheriff court where, on 18 December 1960, I was sent to St Joseph's Approved School. I was sentenced to one to three years.

St Joseph's Approved School, Tranent, East Lothian

6. When I first arrived at the school I saw it was a large building but there was only about ten other boys in the place as all the others were on home leave because it was Christmas. The ten boys that were there had no family so had to stay on at the school. The school was run by the De La Salle Brothers.

Routine

Mornings and bedtime

7. You would get up in the morning at 7:00am then got washed, made your bed then had breakfast. After breakfast you would have jobs to do. My job was sweeping up the big yard with some of the other boys. After doing that you would get changed into your school gear. We went to school two or three times a week
8. As you got older you would go to the workshop. That was where I worked with Mr GVV the tailor. He was a civilian. I was good at sewing and got on well with him. I was good enough that I helped make vestments for priests and even helped make vestments for the Bishop of Edinburgh.
9. There were 3 dorms and about forty in each dorm. There was a fourth dorm which was known as the "pee the bed dorm" for those who wet their beds. I would say there were thirty or forty in that dorm and they would have to strip their beds every morning and take the sheets to the laundry. They weren't punished for wetting their beds.

10. I think there were twelve or thirteen brothers plus civilian staff as well as the matron and kitchen staff. We didn't wear a uniform as such but each boy wore a colour distinctive to whatever house they were in. My house, St Patrick's, wore green; St Andrew's wore blue; St Joseph's wore red; and De La Salle wore light-blue. When I arrived I was given a new suit and a second-hand suit. I don't know what happened to the clothes I had been wearing.
11. At midday you would have lunch then it would be back to either school or the workshops. After that you would have tea followed by some leisure time. Then you would have a shower and we would be in bed for 9:30 pm.

Leisure time

12. On a Saturday we would go to the cinema in Tranent which was about half a mile along the road. On a Sunday some of the brothers would take you on a five or six mile stroll along the beach at Port Seton.
13. We played a lot of football. I was in the school team and we used to play other schools. Our school won the league a few times. I really enjoyed playing football until that Brother LVD started picking on me. I packed in playing for the team after that and talked a few of the other better players into chucking it as well. After that LVD hated me.

Religion

14. We always went to mass on a Sunday and on certain saints' days. I think it was the local priest who came in to say mass. I used to wonder how they could beat us up but still go to communion and confession. Other than that the only religion was kneeling down in the chapel saying the rosary as a punishment. We didn't have to say prayers in the morning or at night though you did say grace at meal times.

Food

15. The food was excellent. You got three good meals a day and toast at night. The brothers didn't eat with us but there would always be three or four present during meals to supervise us.

School

16. We only did school two or three times a week but they were teaching us stuff I had learned in primary school. The ages in the class were all mixed and ranged from twelve to fifteen.
17. There was also a woodwork class and a pipe band where you could learn to play the bagpipes or the drums. Brother GRE took that class.

Holidays/trips

18. We didn't go on holidays but we went berry-picking every year for six weeks at a time. We went to somewhere in Forfar. We would live in wooden huts which had sinks at the end of them for us to wash in. It was long hours and hard work. We would start by picking strawberries.
19. They paid the brothers who would then give us some of the money. I think I got about £4 for the six weeks. Everybody from the school went on these trips.
20. There was one occasion when we were picking raspberries. When you did that you had to watch out for the wasps' nests. On one occasion me and my friend KEV (who I called KEV) threw a stone at one of the nests just as one of the brothers was checking up on us. He must have got stung about twenty times. We were still getting the usual punishments when we were picking the fruit.

Birthdays and Christmas

21. Christmas was alright. You got a nice dinner but you didn't get any gifts. You used to get pocket money. I used to get a half-crown which you could spend in the tuck shop. Birthdays weren't celebrated.

Visits/Inspections

22. I didn't get any visitors and I only got two home visits in all the time I was there. I only saw my family three times in all my time there. I never did tell my parents about the abuse I was receiving. I don't think we were allowed visitors.
23. For punishment, as well as getting the belt, you would lose days for going home. In fact, at Christmas, we would get two weeks at home but I had lost so many days I didn't get home until 2 January and had to be back by 5 January.
24. I never got any visits from anybody official. If anybody official visited the place to inspect it then I wasn't aware of it. Given what went on in there I would be surprised if the place was ever inspected. Surely if it was inspected people would have found out what the place was like?

Medical care

25. There was a matron who stayed there full-time and a doctor who was brought in if one was needed. I remember I saw a doctor when I had chicken-pox but I never saw a doctor after any of the batterings I got.
26. I don't know of any dental care they had there but that might be because I always had good teeth.

Abuse at St Joseph's

27. The abuse started on the very first night that I arrived. What had happened was that, when the probation officer and I were taking the train from Glasgow to Edinburgh, I

tried to run away from him in Queen Street station. However, he kept hold of me. When we got to St Joseph's I was taken to SNR [REDACTED]'s office on the first floor and he was told what I had done.

28. SNR [REDACTED]'s name was Brother PAF [REDACTED]. He got two other brothers to take off my shorts and underpants and hold me down. I can't remember the names of those two brothers. I was then given twelve strokes of the tawse across my backside. I was in hysterics because of the pain and the shame.
29. After being beaten I was dragged to the chapel and forced to kneel on the bare floorboards and say out loud five decades of the rosary. After that I was dragged to a dormitory by the two brothers who had held me down. I was punched and kicked there and put to bed.
30. After I was put to bed I couldn't stop crying because my backside was bruised and welts were standing out of my skin about a quarter of an inch. The most painful part was where the tawse had missed my buttocks (because of me squirming about in pain and fright) and landed on my back or curled round my sides and landed on the back of my thighs. Not only could I not sleep that night, because I had to lie on my stomach, I could not sit or lie on my back for a week.
31. When the brothers left the dorm, and because I wouldn't stop crying, the other boys tried to help me. They told me that saying the rosary out loud was the brothers way of making sure you said the rosary rather than putting your head down and pretending. Over the next few days the other boys taught me the score on how to behave and about keeping my mouth shut.
32. As a Catholic and regular at mass with my mother, [REDACTED] I was amazed how these religious brothers could be so cruel and evil. I went on to be beaten so many times over the next two years that I lost count. I reckon I probably got twelve of the best about 70 times during my time there. I think I got picked on because I was tall.

33. We were punished for incidents of misbehaviour every Wednesday afternoon in the school assembly hall. All the brothers had notebooks in which they would make a note of anything you did that they considered to be wrong. Sometimes they were really sneaky because they wouldn't tell you that they had noted something down about you. This meant that Wednesday was really stressful for all the boys because you didn't know if a brother had noted an indiscretion that you didn't even realise you had done.
34. SNR [REDACTED], Brother PAF [REDACTED] would read out our indiscretions from a ledger and it was him who would then hand out the punishment. If he wasn't there for whatever reason it would be done by his SNR [REDACTED] Brother GRE [REDACTED]. Your name would be called out by SNR [REDACTED] saying something like "P6 Doherty. Swearing in the yard last Thursday. Twelve strokes of the belt".
35. Once you were called out you were stripped naked in front of everybody and forced to put on a pair of tartan shorts. We would then be made to bend over a small snooker table while two brothers held our hands and arms and a third lay on the floor and held our legs. Brother PAF [REDACTED] would then proceed to give you twelve strokes of the tawse. He didn't hold back and really put his weight into the strokes. It didn't matter if you were twelve or fifteen years of age, you screamed the place down.
36. The incredible thing was that this was done in front of not only all the boys, brothers and civilian teachers but the matron and female staff from the kitchen were also made to watch. We never got to talk to the kitchen staff so never got to know their names but some of them were quite young, maybe eighteen or nineteen. This was very embarrassing but, after four or five times, you got used to it. Sometimes there were twelve to fifteen boys getting this punishment every week.
37. The punishments that were handed out on a Wednesday were recorded in a big leather ledger like the big ones an accountant would have used in the past. Brother PAF [REDACTED] had this on a lectern on a stage four or five feet above us and would make an entry in the book for every punishment handed out that day.

38. As well as the tawse I received many beatings from the brothers with their fists and boots. I remember Brother LVD punching me as I came out of the shower after I had stopped playing for the football team. As I lay on the floor, puking my guts up, I told him I would never play for the team again while he was in charge.
39. He was the youngest of the brothers and really fancied himself as a footballer but in the practice games that he played in he was a dud and would always kick anybody who tackled or sauntered past him in a game. I hated that wee bastard. One time I waylaid him in the woods where he was walking. I was 14 at the time and had stolen a knife from the kitchen. I threatened him with the knife, telling him I would stab him if he ever hit me again. He was a coward and left me alone after that.
40. I used to like the sports and playing football but once I stopped doing that there was no fun. You always had to watch what you were doing and saying because a brother might overhear you swearing and make a note of it without you knowing.
41. Once I got to about 14 and a half years of age I tended not to get the belt.

The "freezing incident"

42. I was 13 and a half years old when the worst thing happened to me. One morning we were all coming down the stairs in single file to breakfast at 7am. There was a brother standing on every landing moving from left to right looking up and down the stairs. As we came down in single file I pushed the boy in front who, of course, shoved the boy in front and so on down the line.
43. It was just my luck that Brother LUU, a big giant Irishman, poked his head round just as I shoved the first boy who happened to be my pal KEV (who I called KEV). Brother LUU went mad. He attacked me with fists and boots. I was 13 and a half years old, tall and skinny while he was in his mid-thirties, 14 or 15 stone and six feet plus. He beat me, blacking my eyes, dragged me down the rest of the stairs and out into the yard. Other brothers rushed to join in and I got assaulted by them as well. I don't remember who they were.

44. KEV tried to help me but got beaten as well getting punched and kicked by the brothers. After we were assaulted KEV was sent to the dining room to get his breakfast. Brother LUU dragged me to a bench in the yard that was opposite Brother PAF's office window. I was made to sit on that bench. He told me, while still kicking and punching me, that I wasn't to move from there till I was told.
45. I was wearing shorts, a shirt and a thin woollen jumper and had boots and socks on. It was winter, 7am and very frosty. I had to sit there all day, too petrified to move because Brother PAF was watching me and, on the occasions that he wasn't, his place was taken by another brother. I was shaking with the cold and I couldn't speak because my teeth were chattering. At one point my friend KEV tried to get over to see if I was alright but he got a beating for trying to show concern for me.
46. I sat on that bench freezing till it was dark at about 4 or 5pm. At that time Brother LUU arrived with two other brothers and dragged me to the showers, all the time kicking and punching me. In the shower room they stripped me and threw me into a shower. I just remember lying there in the shower throwing up, shaking and being unable to speak because I was chattering so much with the cold.
47. That was the only time that I received that particularly brutal punishment and I have no recollection of seeing it happen to anybody else. Years later a solicitor showed me statements by some of the other survivors of St Joseph's who described seeing what happened to me that day. They said it was the worst thing they had seen.
48. After the shower I remember being dragged to the chapel wearing pyjamas but I recall that I couldn't pray as I was too cold to say the words. The next thing is that I was in my bed and KEV was there trying to comfort me saying I should go to sleep and that I would be alright. He was crying. I had never seen him cry before and it made me think I was going to die.

49. I don't remember much about the next six days as I was sick and under the matron's care. KEV sneaked in to see me a couple of times and got a beating each time he did but it never stopped him coming to visit me. That meant so much to me.

50. When I was in sick-bay I was hallucinating and don't remember very much. I was going in and out of consciousness. KEV later told me I was being treated for hypothermia due to being out in the yard in sub-zero conditions for ten hours. I can't remember seeing a doctor while I was under the care of the matron for those six days and no-one was allowed to see me.

51. After I was let out of the sick-bay I was allowed to do light duties for a couple of weeks and KEV looked after me. The rest of the boys treated me like a hero. However, after three or four weeks I was beaten by Brother LUU for some minor infringement and things returned to normal.

Brother LUU

52. Brother LUU was always hitting the boys. You could just be sitting in the dining room and he would come up and hit you on your head with his knuckles or even a set of keys. It was agony and you probably hadn't even done anything to deserve it.

53. Brother LUU was brutal to all of us. A few months after the "freezing" incident a few of the boys decided they were going to take revenge on him by hanging his dog. It was a beautiful creature and though I didn't want to be involved I got caught up in it all. About ten of us took the dog into the woods and hanged it. I have been ashamed of being involved in that throughout my life.

54. That lunchtime Brother LUU came into the dining room with a big stick and went berserk. He was lashing out at all of us and it took five of the other brothers to pull him away. After that he was sent away. I think he had had some sort of breakdown. We all thought he was sent away on retreat.

Leaving St Joseph's

55. I left the school when I was fifteen. They only told me the day before that I was leaving. They gave me a new suit and shoes and I was taken to Waverley station in Edinburgh where they gave me a train ticket and some money to get the bus home. There was no sort of preparation for me leaving.

Life after being in care

56. When I got home I went straight to work working with the Co-op milk runs. I was glad to be home.
57. At home I was often in trouble and got three months detention and then five year in prison when I was about twenty. That was in 1968 and I got out in 1971 when I started working in demolition. It was a couple of years later, in 1973, that I again met my mate **KEV**. I hadn't seen him since I had left St Joseph's.
58. After leaving approved school I was full of anger and resentment which pointed me in a bad direction which is why, over the next seven years or so, I was trouble. I would not do a thing I was told and would fight anybody who tried to make me do something I didn't want to do.
59. My life was a shambles and I was a big lump of a man who would do whatever I liked hence the reason I ended up in prison. I came out of prison mad with the world.
60. I first met my wife when I was eighteen but she fell out with me when I got sent to jail. However, after I got out I went to the dancing and **██████** was the first face I saw and we've been together ever since. She is the only person I have ever listened to in my whole life. I think if I hadn't met her I would have spent my life in and out of jail.

Reporting of abuse

61. My wife was the only person I've ever spoke to about what happened at St Joseph's but that was more than twenty years after we met.
62. I did try to sue the De La Salle Brothers for what they did to me all those years ago but I came up against the time-bar and couldn't go any further. It was about ten years ago that I went to see a solicitor about it.
63. A few months ago I got a call from a female police officer from Dalkeith who later came to my house and took a statement over about four hours. I gave her full details about my time in St Joseph's.

Impact

64. To this day I won't do a thing I'm told and I resent authority. I don't listen to anybody and sometimes I can only react with violence instead of reasoning. My wife is the only one I will listen to. My wife was the only person to whom I told the whole story to about what happened to me at St Joseph's. I think a lot of people who went to St Joseph's came out with a lot of resentment.
65. When I look back I thank God I met my friend KEV In an approved school you pair up with a friend and the two of you share everything that life throws at you. He was always there for me and me for him. He was my brother. We stood together against the staff and a lot of the other boys, many of whom were bullies and would take anything if you were soft enough to let them.
66. In all my time in St Joseph's I watched his back and he watched mine. The other boys after a few run-ins with us left us alone. The brothers were a different matter but we were always there to comfort each other, leaping in and trying to stop the beatings each of us we were given.

67. KEV died a few years ago of cancer. It was after he died I decided to try and get justice for him and all the other young kids who were physically and mentally abused by authorities who were charged with looking after us. KEV and I were there because we had done wrong but some were there because they were orphans. One boy who had lost both his parents in a car crash was treated just as bad as us.
68. I find it hard to tell people things, to show my feelings. I don't think my time in St Joseph's affected me as a parent but I think that's because of the way my parents raised me. My dad was a soldier and he didn't show me any affection but I have always cuddled my kids.
69. I do think of my time in the approved school from time to time, especially if I see something on television. I remember seeing "The Magdalene Sisters" and it really affected me.

Treatment/Support

70. I have never sought nor required any sort of counselling. I am sure it helps others but it's not for me

Records

71. I've never tried to obtain my records.

Hopes for the Inquiry

72. I want people named and brought to justice. I want people to pay for what happened to KEV and me and kids like us. We got an apology from Jack McConnell when he was First Minister but I don't want any more apologies, I want justice. The whole

fabric of society let us down badly, MPs, politicians, councillors, educational authorities, school inspectors and the Catholic Church.

73. They all knew what was happening to us children in these establishments up and down the country. I want compensation for the physical and mental abuse I suffered in that hell-hole when I was there for two years and one month. The things I suffered there still affect me today 54 years after I left the place at the age of 15.

Lessons to be Learned

74. There has to be investigations into these places and they need to be inspected. There has to be people that go into these places and look thoroughly at their procedures.
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.....

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the witness.

Dated.....

3 : 8 : 17