

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

GFO

Support person present: No.

1. My name is GFO which I changed in 2004. I took my mother's name but left an "I" in out of it. My name when I was in the care system was GFO GFO. My date of birth is the 1968. I am 53 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care.

2. My father was called and my mother was. I was the oldest of three children. My brother was born in 1970 and my sister was born in 1971. I looked after from the day she was born and my father brought her home from hospital. I have never got on with my brother. I was born and brought up in Loanhead, Midlothian.
3. My brother passed away in in 2010 and my sister died in 2018. That was the most upsetting as I was very closed to and it broke me.
4. My parents used to sit in the house next door and get drunk all the time. My father took off in 1974 when I was six leaving us alone with my mother. My father had sexually abused me. I recall that we never had any food between a Thursday and a Saturday as my mother didn't know anything about claiming benefits from the local authority. I remember that we used to eat some of my grandparents "meals on wheels" in those days. We were hungry a lot of the time. I remember that we didn't have a cooker until 1980 but used to heat everything up on the fireplace.

5. When my father left things got worse. My mother was convinced that I looked like my father. My mother suffered from brain damage and she used to cut me. When she got drunk she would start "droolin". She would hold a knife to my neck and cut me and threaten to kill me. I told her to go ahead and kill me but she just made small cuts. My mother is now deceased.
6. When I was twelve and living at home something happened to me that caused a temporary paralysis and meant I didn't get out of bed for six months. I "ballooned up" and put on a lot of weight. It caused me to miss a lot of schooling. My mother never contacted a doctor so I don't know what was wrong with me.
7. My mother would put sleeping tablets into my coffee and food and so when someone like my social worker came to visit I would be asleep and I was unable to tell them what was happening. My brother [REDACTED] was placed in Dr Guthrie's School when he was about ten years old. Everything started to go downhill when I was about twelve years old after my grandmother died.
8. My social worker at this time was called Maisy Inglis I also had a social worker from Ohio called Jody but I can't recall her surname. I didn't have Jody for very long.
9. When I was thirteen I recall going in front of the Children's panel and their concern was that I had fallen eighteen months behind in my schooling. I was in second year at school and should have been leaving third year. I would just walk out of the classroom. I only stayed in school for the music lessons. The Children's panel gave me another chance to live at home if I attended school.
10. When I was about fourteen I was living in a camp for volunteers situated in the countryside near Eddleston. I had initially gone there for a holiday but stayed on. The social services were involved and I knew that I was going into care eventually. I was offered the choice of continuing to stay at the camp or going to Howdenhall Assessment Centre.

11. I had heard about Howdenhall and didn't fancy going there. I elected to stay at the camp. The volunteers at the camp knew that I was only fourteen so they created a junior volunteer status to allow me to stay there. I knew that it was not going to be permanent.
12. I was assessed by a psychiatrist and was told that I had a learning age of a twenty-five year old and the emotional range of a six year old. I was fourteen when this assessment was done.
13. Because the home I was due to go was not ready to receive me I continued to live at the camp site at Eddleston. I really enjoyed it there and you could do things like horse riding. I even sat my Duke of Edinburgh award badges and was one of the youngest to get them. I was there from June to August.
14. When the time came for me to go to the List D School I was given the choice between Wellington School or St Joseph's School. I chose St Joseph's because I knew that they let you out at the weekend. I recall that Maisy Inglis took me to have a look round both schools.
15. I was abusing glue at this time and when I went into care. I was still abusing glue and dry cleaning fluid when I was at St Joseph's. Prior to going into care one of the other glue sniffers died after buzzing glue on the local woods. I can't remember the name of that boy but I was there when he died. We didn't know how to resuscitate him.

St Joseph's List D School, Tranent, East Lothian.

16. I learned a week before I went to St Joseph's who ran the home. There were some boys from my town who had been there and they told me that it was alright.

17. When all boys arrived at St Joseph's they would assess their academic ability and I was always found to be in the top range for intelligence. Soon after I arrived and was intelligence tested I was moved to another cottage which held the more intelligent boys. That was despite the fact I tried my hardest to fail the test as I didn't want to go to school.
18. St Joseph's consisted of a main building and four cottages. There was a small road that took you into the school. There were the four cottages and also some housing for staff attached to these cottages. At the carpark at the rear of the building there was a large clown painted on the wall. The main building was accommodation for the priests and monks.
19. There was a dining room attached to each cottage. I shared a room with two boys in my cottage. I think that one of the boys had the surname [REDACTED] but I can't remember his first name. I think the others were called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
20. It was all boys at St Joseph's when I was there. I think that there were between forty and fifty boys. We were all in the same age bracket of fourteen to sixteen. I think that girls eventually came to the school but not during the time I was there.
21. The school was run by the monks who were called Brothers but there was also civilian staff who were mainly teachers. The teaching staff normally taught at Ross High School but the ones who were too handy with the belt or got into trouble were transferred to St Joseph's to teach. They were a violent bunch of teachers.
22. I was still sniffing glue when I was at St Joseph's and I am sure that the staff knew but they didn't give me any help to stop. I was eventually moved to the senior boys' cottage as I was getting up early in the morning to go to work. I was doing a job in a local dairy to gain work experience and after six months when I turned sixteen I was offered a permanent position at the dairy.

Staff.

23. The staff I remember were GFJ [REDACTED] who taught outdoor pursuits, Mr MHC [REDACTED] who was known as MHC [REDACTED] was a teacher in the classrooms. There was also a geography teacher but I can't recall his name. There was also a woman teacher who everyone took 'the micky' out of. I can't recall her name. There was also a metalwork teacher who was very much older and we called him 'MJK [REDACTED]'. He may have been in his 70's.
24. There was a nurse who was there to treat minor injuries. She had a room in the main building and I did have to go and see her on at least one occasion when I was hit by the geography teacher. There was also a house mother who was responsible for the cottage that you lived in and she looked after you out of school or work hours. She also did the cleaning and cooking.
25. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. One of them was LVI [REDACTED] and worked in the boiler room while the other one was a social worker attached to St Joseph's.
26. Brother Benedict was also on the teaching staff. There was a Brother MJG [REDACTED] who I think was the SNR [REDACTED]. Brother MBU [REDACTED] who was quite a nice man. They had been at St Joseph's for a long time.
27. Most of the Brothers were middle aged when they were there and they spoke with Irish accents. I seem to remember another Brother who was in his twenties. I can't remember his name but he had been a pupil at St Joseph's when he was a young boy. I think that he was a "novice" or a trainee monk.
28. The brothers would wear their habits which were brown in colour and went down to their feet. They wore black doc marten shoes. They also has a crucifix and you could hear them coming before you saw them because of the noise the crucifix and chain made. I wasn't sure who was a priest and who was a Brother as it made very little difference to me.

Routine at St Joseph's List D School, Tranent.

First day

29. The first day I arrived I was dropped off by my mother and social worker Maisy Inglis. I was standing at the top of the steps when the door was shut. I was hit on the head with a pool ball. I don't know who threw it at me. The priest that was there told me in an Irish accent that they had me now and to "say goodbye to my mummy and wet nurse". It was Brother Benedict that said that.
30. I spent most of the day terrified of what was happening. One of the other boys told me to keep my mouth shut and don't be cheeky and I would be alright. I was shown to a room in one of the cottages and shown where my bed was. I was in a cottage in the grounds which was fairly new and was called Ben Aldiss. There were four cottages in all and I think that two of the others was called Savio and Ogilvie but I can't recall the name of the other.

Mornings and bedtime

31. The normal time for getting up was about 07:30 am. You would have your breakfast at the cottage and then you would be at school between 09:00 am and 4:30 pm. I found the schooling very boring as it was stuff I already knew and I couldn't be bothered to learn it again.
32. I was only at St Joseph's for about six months when I managed to get a job in a local dairy. I had to get up at 6:00 am to go to my work which was in Tranent. I was happy to get out of St Joseph's for eight hours of the day. When I was offered a permanent job at the dairy I gave up glue sniffing and started smoking cannabis.
33. I recall that on some mornings we did an aerobics class while we were sitting in our chairs in the cottage. I remember we used to call it "chairobics". We were supposed to do some chores but I managed to avoid them as I was useless at helping. When I started to go to work at the dairy I didn't have to do any chores.

34. You would be in your bed for ten o'clock. I shared a room for most of the time I was there until I was moved to the working man's cottage where I had a room of my own. It didn't matter when the light was put out if you had your own room.

Mealtimes / Food

35. We had regular meals but there was never enough. I recall that we did have a cooked breakfast at the weekends. I was quite wary of food at this time because I knew that my mother had drugged me by putting sleeping tablets into my food. I think that the food was okay nothing special. I would often go into Tranent and buy food there because I knew that it could not have been tampered with. You were not punished for not eating food but it would be mentioned by the staff that you should eat it.
36. We had a woman that would prepare the food. She was a house mother and I think she lived in the cottage. I can't recall her name.

Washing / bathing

37. There was no privacy for washing and showering as it was communal. I was very self-conscious of my body and so it was very awkward for me. The Brothers would occasionally stick their head round the door when you were showering.

Pocket money

38. The Brothers gave me the choice of either pocket money of about two pounds fifty a week or rolling tobacco that would last me the whole week. It was quite a lot of money in those days and I spent a lot of it on food that I prepared for myself back at the cottage. We had use of a microwave cooker. I would also buy glue to sniff.

Clothing / uniform

39. There was a uniform which was brown corduroy trousers, black rubber shoes, a green jersey and a "jaggy" T shirt. I was given these clothes when you arrived and you were expected to wear them through the week but you could wear your own clothes at the weekend. You could hand in your clothes to be laundered by the house mother.

School

40. I only attended school for about five months when I was at St Joseph's as I was working in a local dairy.

Trips / Holidays/ Leisure

41. I was allowed to go out of St Joseph's to the local towns. What I learned though was that there was a two hundred year old feud between Tranent and Prestonpans and St Joseph's was bang in the middle between the towns. I would be chased by both sets of boys from these towns who assumed I had loyalty to the other town. It was too dangerous to go out and about. I was able to stay in my room in the cottage and lock the door.
42. I was heavily into music and I had a small keyboard that I could play and I liked to lock myself in my room where I could enjoy my music.
43. I was supposed to go to East Linton on a camping holiday with the rest of the school but for some reason not known to me I was not allowed to go. It was never explained to me.

44. I did go to East Linton on one occasion and I was given some neat Bacardi by one of the boys and I got drunk. I remember that I had thrown up on the bus home. I recall lying behind the road sign for East Linton when LVH the social worker and LVI the boiler man who owned a "kit car" drove past me. I "gave the finger" to LVI and he wasn't happy. I was taken back to the Brothers who put me into a shower with all my clothes on. It was the first time that I had ever been drunk.

Birthdays and Christmas

45. I was there at Christmas and I remember that you got extra tobacco and an extra pound pocket money. I never managed to get home because my mother had made it clear that she didn't want me to come home. There was no celebration for my birthday although I knew what day it was.

Visits / Inspections/ Review of Detention

46. I didn't receive any visits at St Joseph's' My mother had phoned St Joseph's and told the staff that she didn't want me home at the weekends and that I was dead to her. The staff had to tell me this and so I never got to go home at weekends. I remember when I first arrived at St Joseph's that if you didn't attend a mass then you were not allowed to go home at the weekends.
47. I may have had two visits from my social worker Maisie Inglis but there was always a member of staff nearby so you couldn't tell her about what was happening. I don't think that I trusted Maisie Inglis anyway so I didn't tell her anything. There was also a social worker called LVH and I found him to be very pleasant and I was able to talk to him. He was working at St Joseph's.
48. I do recall that we did have visits from the girls who attended Dr Guthrie's Girls School. Personally I didn't think that this was a good idea because the inevitable happened and there was sexual activity that I didn't want any part of as I was a late developer and didn't want to be involved.

Healthcare

49. I had to go and see the nurse on one occasion when GFJ ██████ backhanded me in the face when I wrongly guessed his age. I needed aspirin and plasters. I could not tell the nurse that GFJ ██████ had hit me as it would have got back to him and I would be threatened by him and punished again for grassing so I just kept quiet.
50. I was injured once when one of the boys was playing around with a strimmer and a piece of it broke off and hit me in the face. I received a big weal across my whole face. I suspect it was just an accident although it left me with a scar. I think I was just treated with some cream administered by the nurse.

Religion

51. The school was run by Catholic priests and monks but I didn't like religion and so I did not go to church or attend the masses. I didn't have any religion before I came into St Joseph's. I didn't understand about Christianity and wanted nothing to do with it. In the early days I found excuses not to go to. I do recall that the prayers were in Latin.

Bed wetting

52. I did wet the bed when I was at St Joseph's. I was told that when I reached puberty it would stop. I think that is why I was given a single room quicker. The house mother would wash the sheets and I wasn't punished for wetting the bed. I managed to keep it from the other boys which would have caused me problems and I would have been humiliated. The bed wetting did stop when I went through puberty.

Running away

53. There were some occasions when I ran away. There was one occasion when me and another boy ran away because we knew that we were going to be leathered by one the Brothers. We got onto the beach at Portobello having walked there from Prestonpans. At one stage we had to come off the beach and on to the road because the tide was in. We spotted the minibus from St Joseph's so when we walked past it we bolted and they couldn't catch us.
54. My mate and I were on the run for three days. I decided to go back because I didn't want to get involved in crime. When I got back I was leathered and locked into a small room. It was the staff who were on duty at the weekend when I ran away who leathered me. They always hit you where it wouldn't show like on your legs.

Substance abuse

55. I was still sniffing glue while I was at St Joseph's but towards the end of my time there I started using cannabis. It was much cheaper to use and more available. It had the desired effect when you smoked it.

Discipline

56. You could still get the belt or the cane from the Brothers or the teachers. I remember that one of the teachers was able to belt a fifty pence piece into one of the desks where it would stick. He was a very big man at six feet four inches with a glass eye but I can't recall his name.
57. I would always prefer the belt to the cane. You would be belted for stealing, telling lies or mucking the Brothers about. You would get either one or two strokes of the cane across the backside and it was unbelievably painful.

Abuse at St Joseph's List D School, Tranent.

58. Mr MHC [REDACTED] who was one of the teachers and known as "MHC [REDACTED]" used to throw blackboard dusters at you and if they hit you it was very painful and also dangerous. He had two dusters of different sizes and called them "big Eck" and "wee Eck". Wee Eck you could swat away but not big Eck. He could have taken someone's eye out or fractured someone's skull.

59. Mr MHC [REDACTED] would also get you to smell the coffee. He had a bottle which he would take the lid off and make you smell the coffee. Instead of coffee there was some sort of ammonia so when you smelled it your eyes felt like they were popping out of your head. He could only do it once until you caught on. I used to warn the new boys about him but nobody warned me.

60. There was a metalwork teachers whose name I can't recall but he had the nickname 'MJK [REDACTED]'. He would pick up any tools that were lying around and throw them at you. He was an older man and did throw some tools at me which I was able to duck although on the odd occasion he did hit me but I did not need medical help.

61. GFJ [REDACTED] backhanded me in the mouth. It was the weekend and I was sitting watching television when he asked what age I thought he was. He was probably late 20's but I guessed he was about forty five because he had a beard and glasses and looked old to me. He backhanded me and caused a tear which I still have to this day where the lip meets the side of my mouth. It was very painful at the time when he hit me and it was really for no reason. It was swollen for days afterwards. I had to go to see the nurse for treatment but I couldn't tell her how it happened.

62. Brother Benedict had a speaker case which had a dynamo in it. He would get five or six of the boys to hold hands and two of them would make contact with the anode and the cathode. He would crank it up by turning a handle which sent a shock through everyone. On one occasion he made me grab it and I couldn't let go because of the speed he was powering the dynamo. I was terrified and getting a severe shock. He thought that it was funny but I certainly did not. I was tricked into doing it and when I had to do it on my own it was very painful and I couldn't let go.
63. You had to watch out for the staff that were on at the weekend as they were the worst for hitting you. GFJ [REDACTED], LVI [REDACTED] the boiler man and a man called LUZ [REDACTED] were the worst offenders. They would leather you the thick end of the pool cue. They also had a leather belt that they used. I still have the scars on my head where I was hit.
64. The one time when I got drunk at East Linton and was put into the shower with my clothes on all the Brothers came and looked at me in the shower. I think that they were "perving" after me.
65. I am sure there was sexual abuse going on but the boys wouldn't talk about it. There was a room near the Headmaster's office and if you saw a boy coming out of it you knew that he had been punished as the punishment from the Brothers was never carried out on front of anyone. I did see other boys receiving physical violence which was going on all the time. Sometimes the other staff would make you bend over the pool table and you would get the cane on your back.
66. I don't really want to discuss the abuse that happened to me at St Joseph's. I want you to make up your own minds but if you were to imagine the worst thing possible, that is what happened to me. I need to think about it more as it is still locked in my head.

Leaving St Joseph's List D School, Tranent.

67. I turned sixteen and it was time for me to leave care at St Joseph's, I was told by my boss at the dairy where I was working that I would be moving on to full time work and would be paid as opposed to the six month probation I had been on. I was told that St Joseph's had organised an advertisement in the papers for someone who could provide digs for me in Tranent. It was to cost me twenty five pounds a week to be treated like a dog.

Lodging with unknown lady in Tranent.

68. I think it was in [REDACTED] when the home found a woman living in Tranent who was able to take me in. I cannot remember that woman's name. I was just glad to be leaving St Joseph's but it turned out that this woman I was lodging with was unreasonable to the point of insanity.
69. An example of this would be that I would be working in a fridge at the dairy from 7:00 am until 4:00 pm. I would be wet and frozen. One of the days I came back to the digs and put the electric fire on to get a heat. She told me to move so that the dog could get a heat despite the fact it had never been out. She would never turn on the heating in the house as she told me that I was only paying her twenty five pounds a week which was more than half of my salary.
70. The woman said things to me that I was just a kid from care and she didn't expect me to know how to behave. She treated me worse than her dogs. I remember that she never gave me enough to eat. I'd had enough of this type of treatment.
71. At this time there was a boy from Dundee who was also from the home. He had befriended me as I had left St Joseph's and he started to hang about with me. One day after we had some cans of beer he assaulted me by punching me twice in the face. This was the last straw and I realised it was time to get out of Tranent.

72. I only lasted a few months at Tranent when I quit the job and left the digs to go back to my mother's house in Loanhead. I was much bigger now so I was able to fight back when my mother attacked me. My mother wouldn't let me stay at the house so I ended up sleeping on the streets of Loanhead.

73. I had a couple of pals in Loanhead whose mothers were aware that I was sleeping rough and so they reported it to the social work department. The result of this was that I was moved to Calder Grove Children's Home in Edinburgh by the social work department. The social work department were obliged to look after me until I was twenty one as there was a care order to that effect and I was also on probation.

Care at Calder Grove Children's Home.

74. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Care at Southhouse Adolescent Unit, Southhouse Grove, Edinburgh

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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83. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Leaving care at Southhouse Adolescent Unit

89. When I first left Southhouse I ended up in a "wet hostel" in the Grassmarket in Edinburgh which was for drug addicts and alcoholics. I think that it was the social worker that organised this. I tried to complain because I was not an alcoholic and all I did was smoke some cannabis.
90. I was having issues with drugs and when I turned eighteen and had left Southhouse I went to stay with the Cyrenian's. I think I also stayed in a guest house in Mayfield Road in Edinburgh where I was well looked after. I went down to London and got involved with the rave drug scene down there. In London I was working and able to function while still taking drugs.

Reporting of abuse during time in the care system.

91. I tried to make a complaint to someone from the social work department when I was sent to the wet hostel in the Grassmarket. I spoke to them on the phone and told them some things that had happened to me in care. I asked them why I was in a hostel for alcoholics and drug addicts when all I had done was to take some cannabis. I was still on probation for that offence. I tried to complain but they just weren't listening.
92. I also tried to tell my mother what was happening to me but she didn't want to know. I could not understand why my mother hated me so much and I couldn't get her to talk about it.
93. I have learned in later life that I was born as a result of my father raping my mother. It was because of this that my mother resented me.

Life after being in care

94. I made my way to London when I was about nineteen. I made a lot of money down there but lost it all so I returned to Scotland. I eventually went to live with my "community carers" who were based in Tranent. They were called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who were a very important part of my life.
95. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] should have been my parents. I stayed with them for three years and I really loved them. I was using drugs and I didn't want to put them through this so I had to make my excuses and leave and pretend to be nasty to them. They have both since passed away.
96. Between age twenty-five and forty-nine I have very little memories of my life. I was a drug addict and spent most of the time 'out of my face'. These years are just a blur on my memory. In 2017 I became clean of drugs as a result of being given a test drug which got me clean in five days.
97. I used to be a large man and was known as one of the fattest junkies in Edinburgh. Since I stopped taking drugs I have started to lose lots of weight. I have had a heart attack because I couldn't look after myself. I have also lost all my teeth as a result of my addiction to drugs.
98. My mother had a stroke and passed away, a prisoner in her own body, as she was unable to move or talk. She would never tell me why she put me into care and why she didn't want me to live with her. She didn't want me to tell her what had happened and what I had endured in care.

Impact

99. I am not capable of having a relationship with a woman as "it is just not there". The thought of sleeping with a woman makes me feel very uncomfortable. If I don't have sex again it will be too soon. There was a period just after I came out of the care system when I would chase any lady that moved as I felt I had to prove my sexuality to myself and others and the fact that I was "straight". I was just kidding myself as I had no real interest in sex or relationships.
100. I have not had friendship relationships because I cannot trust anyone. I feel that people will end up hurting me. I have only ever had a relationship with one member of my family my wee sister [REDACTED] which I was able to pick up after I became clean from drugs. I did have contact with her when I was on drugs but I didn't feel that it was fair to her to see me on drugs.
101. My mental health has been badly affected by my time in care. I have been diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress disorder. I don't think that I will ever be normal again.
102. I was being supported by the mental health services in Edinburgh but through a series of events which I had no control over and the COVID 19 situation I have fallen off the books and no longer have their support. I was supposed to see a Community Psychiatric Nurse but this has not happened either. I have been diagnosed by my doctor with depression. I have also developed a temper which I had never had before.
103. For the last eight months I have spent most of my time in my bed in the house that I am living in. I am unable to keep on top of what is required to be done around the house and only go out when I need shopping or have to collect my medication. I am being supported by Health and Mind.

104. I suffer from type 2 diabetes and do not keep good general health. Some of the tablets I take make my dreams very vivid and I do have flashbacks to my time in care.
105. I feel that if I had completed my education and managed to study at school I was bright enough to go on to further education. All my teachers told me that I was very intelligent.
106. I have no love of religion and particularly the Catholic Church and the Orange Lodge of which my father was a member. I didn't have a good opinion of it before I went into care but my opinion was reinforced with the way that the Brothers treated me in St Joseph's. I have always felt that "you live and then you die".

Records

107. I have never tried to get a copy of my records because I have no formal identification. In 2004 I changed my name to GFO from my birth name of GFO. I have no supporting documentation and this has caused me great problems trying to deal with the authorities. I find it hard to prove who I am as I am often asked for two forms of identification which I cannot provide.

Lessons to be learned

108. They could have listened to me and also they could have taken account of the problems I already had before I went into care. The social work never did anything for me and I didn't even get a clothing grant when everyone else did.
109. If children nowadays go into care the environment should be made safe and secure for them. The staff should be properly trained and vetted to look after children. They should be able to identify children with issues. There was not things like "Childline" in my day. I tried to tell my social worker what was happening and the response was to mark me down as a trouble maker. Let the trained people deal with children without interference from government or other authorities.

110. 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... GFO

Dated... 10/9/21