Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of



Support person present: Yes

- My name MBJ though I'm more commonly known as MBJ My date of birth is 1954 and I am 62 years old. My contact details are known to the inquiry.
- 2. I have three children, two boys and a girl and have nine grandchildren.

Institutions

3. The institutions I would like to speak of are St Ninian's in Fife which was a brutal place; St Joseph's, Tranent which had its problems, not as bad as St Ninian's, but that was probably because I was that bit older; and Polmont which was also brutal though I would say that was because it was run as a prison regime.

Life before being put into care

4. I was a bit of a thief, a bad boy. Without making my mum and dad sound too bad I was left to my own devices after school. I was born in the Bridgeton area of Glasgow and then we moved to the Cranhill area just before my eighth birthday. I had already been in trouble with the police on numerous occasions. I had been doing things that you wouldn't believe a child of that age would get up to like stealing lead off the roofs and stealing purses and by the age of seven or eight I was dogging school stealing and breaking and entering.

- 5. At the age of nine I was in the Police Office in Glasgow Central Railway Station and I heard the police say "Tell Mrs that MBJ will not be coming home tonight. He's had enough and he'll be going to Larchgrove Remand Home".
- 6. When we moved to Cranhill I was eight years old and my young brother was born. I broke into Queenslie Industrial Estate with some mates and stole crisps and got sent to Larchgrove. I escaped from Larchgrove but handed myself in. Because I had escaped I got sent to St Ninian's

St Ninian's, Fife

7. I was taken there in an old Morris Minor by two old women and when we approached St Ninian's they stopped and pointed the place out in the distance saying "That's where you're going". This was 1964 and I was just about to turn ten and I was to be there until 1967. It was time and, when we got there, there was only about six or ten kids there as the rest had gone home for

Routine

- 8. You got woken up at 6am to go to church. If you put your towel over the bedstead that meant you had chosen to go to mass. Sometimes you woke up to find your towel there even though you knew you hadn't put it there.
- 9. There were between eight and ten boys in each dorm. My first dorm was the "pee the bed" dorm. I was peeing the bed for the first few weeks I was there, basically because I wanted to be at home. If you did pee the bed you had to bring your sheets down to the laundry room in front of everybody. The rest of the kids would call you "pissy". Once I got used to the place I stopped peeing the bed.
- 10. After mass you would do your ablutions and get dressed. You didn't shower in the morning. Breakfast was taken in the dining room and would be a couple of slices of bread and a plastic cup of tea. You would also get porridge or cornflakes if it was the

weekend when you might also get eggs and sausages. Breakfast could be wild; we were all naughty boys after all. If there were a few spare loaves Mr MCK would go round and hand it out. I remember once a boy asked for four slices and got battered for it by Mr MCK. The food wasn't great but it wasn't bad though it was horrible if it was something you didn't like, like liver or kidney.

- 11. After breakfast you were put into the yard until school. The education was actually quite good and I learned to read and write. You got a break in the morning when you would get half a slice of bread and butter then it would be back to school. I was in the old school. They built a new school when I was there. You would have lunch at about 12:00 or 12:30 pm when you would get soup and a bread roll, mince and potatoes then a pudding with extra custard if you were lucky.
- 12. You would play in the yard after dinner in all sorts of weather wearing only short trousers at all times. The only time I got long trousers was on the day I left. We got put out in the yard in all weathers and sometimes we would have to have a cold shower after it. You could be out there for hours at a time and even in the dark. There would be about thirty or so boys in the shower at any one time. The monks controlled the water and they would turn it off while you still had soap in your hair and they would also belt you with the tawse. They would be hitting you on the bare skin while you were wet. It was agony.
- 13. You would get hacks on your legs from wearing wellingtons. The monks would claim it was dirt and make you scrub it with a nail brush. I was only ever able to do it once as it was agony. I would get a doing after that for not doing it.
- 14. Tea would be 5:30pm and then you would be put back out in the yard or into the basement. About 6pm it would be activities. Brother Benedict's activity group was "Household Electricity's". He would have a big board and tell us to connect this or that then he would flick a switch and we would get an electric shock. Brother Benedict didn't teach a class and when he hit you he did so as if hitting an adult.

- Other activities included hillwalking, arts and crafts and table tennis. Charles McKenna's activity was woodwork but I didn't go to his activity because in class during the day he would just batter you. You would do a different activity every night. We didn't get homework.
- 16. We got evening meal in the dining room. We got three meals a day and a cup of cocoa at night. After getting a shower at night you would get into your pyjamas.

Abuse

- 17. On the first Saturday I was there myself and who we called ran away after a couple of days. It was snowing and freezing and we were going across fields so we didn't get very far. We got caught and we got the belt. I actually told them that two old tramps had stolen our jackets and that we had chased them. Obviously they didn't believe me.
- 18. When you got the belt sometimes it would be on the hands. On other occasions a monk would put your head between his legs then you would get the belt over your arse and as often as not there were three or four other monks watching.
- 19. The day after we ran away Brother Benedict, who was in charge of us, took me down to the basement and kicked the hell out of me. He attacked me as if I was a man and the kicks would lift you off your feet. He dragged me by the hair and I was thinking I had got him into trouble because I had escaped when he was the one that was supposed to be looking after me. He was one of the worst for the brutality. I once saw him break a walking stick over a boy's back.
- 20. My ma came up to visit me and brought me a wee American policeman's uniform. I told her that Brother Benedict had battered me and she went to see Brother

 MCA who was SNR He made me out to be a liar. He was a vicious wee bugger as well. His thing was a straight finger chop to just under your chin. He had long nails and would take the skin off your neck. He also kept a lap boy, a school captain, by his side all the time and would tell him to batter other boys.

- 21. There was a marking system and you got marks that, the more you got, the less pocket money you got till it went down to a penny. The marks got read out every Sunday. If you got marked for swearing you had to put a bit of carbolic soap in your mouth and keep it there until the end. If you spat it out you got punched or belted. I was lucky because I was number which meant I only had to wait a short time till it was finished.
- 22. The monks sat in the big comfy chairs with their favourites sitting nearby. On one occasion I had to do a spelling test for Brother MCA. I got told to spell "CHOIR". I said "C" then "W" and got a straight finger jab. I tried again but started with a "Q" which got me another jab. By this time there was blood on my neck and I was crying and asked how I was supposed to spell it. When he showed me the word I told him I didn't know that that was how it was pronounced.
- 23. There were monks there whose names I didn't know because they took nothing to do with us. There was a wee guy called Charles McKenna who used to hit you with a metal whistle and he would whack you on the head with it. I still have a dent in my head to this day because of it. He was a civilian and worked in the metalwork shed. He was called "Beaky" and had a prominent Adam's apple.
- 24. We got one visit a month on the first Sunday of the month. You got home leave every four weeks if you had good marks. I didn't get many good marks so wasn't allowed home very often. Sometimes I would have injuries that were visible after a beating and they wouldn't let me home because of it. If you got home you got dropped off at Buchanan bus station on a Friday afternoon and you went back on a Sunday night. Even if I wasn't allowed home my mum would still show up at the bus station only to have one of the monks tell her I wasn't being allowed home again because I had been bad.
- 25. I was in a dark corner one night with another boy when Brother Benedict was putting up decorations. It was Christmas time and I was stuck at the school because I had run away again. Brother Benedict sent us to the basement but when we got there

McKenna sent us back up. There was then an argument between McKenna and Brother Benedict as to where a boy should be and McKenna punched him. They were nearly having a tug-of-war with the boy pulling him back and forth.

- 26. Every time you ran away you got given a size 15 pair of working boots to wear with no socks or laces and you had to run round a lawn all day like that. You would end up with blisters and have to wear the boots for a week. The other monks would batter you because you had run away and so would some of the boys because they had lost privileges because you had run away.
- 27. Brother was young. He used to flirt with the female members of staff. He used to batter me constantly and he once asked me what I was in for and I said I was in for stealing. He said "No, what are you in for?" I said "breaking and entering". He then battered me and I started crying. This was done in the new school. He asked again and I said "Dogging school". He battered me again and eventually said "No, it's because your parents hate your guts and don't want you at home".
- 28. About a week later I wrote a letter home telling my parents about Brother MBZ but Brother MBU tore it up and I thought, after what Brother MBZ had said that my family really did hate me. That had a terrible effect on my life. I thought my parents hated me and once I got out of the homes I couldn't wait to get away from my family because I thought they hated me. I started drinking at thirteen and that was one of the reasons I did. It took till I was 37 and had stopped drinking that I realised it wasn't true and that they did love me. My mum never missed a visit to me. It always hurt that my dad died before I realised it wasn't true. I started drinking when I was thirteen but haven't been in prison since I stopped drinking.
- 29. I ran away five times, usually because of the violence inflicted on me or because I was denied home leave again though I think the underlying problem was thinking that my family didn't want me. I would say I lost about 50% of home leave for bad behaviour or because I was too bruised from a battering. This was not unusual. If one of the brothers had given you a battering that left you with obvious bruises they wouldn't let you go home at the weekend so as your family couldn't see the injuries.

- 30. One time we were on a two week camping outing. I hadn't wanted to go as I wanted to go home but because my face was badly bruised the monks decided I couldn't. I believe they lied to my mum and told her I wouldn't be going home because of bad behaviour. We went to Glencoe, Braemar and Fort Augustus visiting other monasteries and sleeping in tents. The places were nice but to me the two weeks were horrible because my face was in agony from a battering I got from Brother
- 31. They used to take us on long walks. It could be freezing, raining or snowing and they would take us on a four or five hour walk without stopping. We would all be crying and they would hit us on the back of our legs or on our backsides with branches simply because they could.
- 32. Looking back on it I can't believe the things they did. On one occasion a group of us were out for a walk by the river and there was snow on the banks of the river. A German monk that was at the place for a short while and was in charge of us on that walk made us strip off naked and get in the river. It was freezing. He then went along the banks with a belt making sure we were right in and then we had to get dressed with no towel to dry off with and then finish the walk. That monk was brutal.
- 33. There was a Brother HED an Irish monk, who was the only one who showed any kindness. I took his name as my confirmation name. If I got battered he would be the one I would go crying to.
- 34. One man called MCN who was grey haired with grey stubble and not much taller than us was also brutal. He once whacked me on the head with a belt that came round my head and hit me on the face. I saw him do that a few times to some of the boys. He probably did it because I was making too much noise or shouting or something trivial like that.
- 35. Mr MCK was nicknamed "wanker". He used to look after the ponies and you would go with him to feed them. They had five ponies. He would put you on one of them

with no saddle then smack the pony's backside whereupon it would dash off and you would inevitably fall off onto the concrete ground. I fell off once and never got back on one. He used to wear a poncho and you could see him playing with himself under it while he watched us shower. That's why he was called "wanker".

- 36. Mco was a civilian. He would hit you with branches when he took you out at the weekend for a walk.
- 37. Mr was a PE Teacher. I remember once we had a routine to do which involved doing ten activities in a very short time. One of the things we had to do was hit a shuttlecock. As soon as I did it I was anxious to move on to the next activity as we were getting marked on it so I threw the racquet to the ground. This wasn't done in temper; I just wanted to keep within the time to do the activities.
- originally called HDQ given he was

 One day he fell against a tree and hurt his pinky. For several nights he was crying with the pain to his pinky and was eventually taken to hospital where he had his pinky cut off.
- 39. There was a matron whose name I forget and who was also in charge of the kitchen. One time I had open sores at my back passage. Every time I went to see her there was always a monk with me and I could see no reason for them being there.
- 40. I remember I was in a sick bay in which there was a single bed and a wardrobe. It was actually a small bedroom. On top of the wardrobe was maybe fifty or sixty empty whiskey, brandy and vodka bottles. I was there for days but there was nothing wrong with me but they still made me stay there. When I look back it looked to me like a monk's room.
- 41. I was groped loads of times. It was in the new school and they had put some beds into it. There was a French monk who was at the school for a few months. Me and

were in that school and the French monk would grope us constantly while play fighting on the bed. We giggled about it but we knew he was up to no good. He once took a big group of us to a river. It was in the summer. We were all naked and were in and out of the river. He had a load of sweets and had us crawling all over him while naked to get the sweets.

- 42. I twice woke up in beds that weren't mine. One of them belonged to a guy called

 My own dormitory was two dormitories away. I never thought about it
 at the time but I now wonder if I was taken out of my bed and put back in the wrong
 one.
- 43. There was a guy called from in Alloa who took the monks to court. He was always crying and getting bullied. It came out later that he was being raped. My long term memory of him was that we always saw him sitting alone by a tree crying his eyes out. We didn't know he was being raped and he never told us.
- 44. There were four brothers from Greenock called and another boy called who got battered by the monks.
- 45. My best mate was **Exercise**. He was my halfer which meant he would get half of anything I got sent like a food parcel or a postal order and in return he would look after me.
- 46. On a laundry change they would make you turn your pants inside out and if they had shit on them you had to scrub them out. They only gave you three pieces of grease-proof toilet paper which was never enough to clean your backside with.
- 47. One boy, purched him in the eye which became badly swollen and swelled up like an apple.

- 48. The belt was given by any of the monks and by any of the civilians. As far as I was aware they didn't make any note of the fact the belt had been given. The headmaster only gave you the belt if you ran away.
- 49. They had a green Lady Dorm which at the age I was I found very scary as I thought there were ghosts there. If you were caught talking at night you got dragged out of bed, thrown over their lap and smacked over the bare bum and forced into the Green Lady dorm where you had to stand in the dark with your hands behind your head for hours. If you moved you would get battered. I remember once I was still there at midnight when the "pee the bed" would be got up to go to the toilet and still being there when they went again at 2 am. This happened to me on numerous occasions. If you moved one of the monks would suddenly appear out of the dark and smack you over the head.
- 50. I remember that on occasions a new boy would come into the school. Mr would come into the dormitory and would call me over and, in front of the new boy, would batter me for nothing. He would then tell the new boy that that is what happens to you if you misbehaved. He probably picked on me because my bed was the first bed as you entered the dormitory.
- 51. Brother MBZ once said to me "If I find any tobacco in your trousers then you're in trouble". He turned my pockets out and found a small amount which wasn't mine. He thereafter punched and punched me. The beatings were constant. If you didn't see beatings you heard them and heard the other kids screaming.
- 52. We had tinned toothpaste and maybe some sweets and maybe the odd toy but those were our only belongings.
- 53. I had toys at first but that stopped. We made our own toys like sledges or bows and arrows. There were also bikes and canoes and in winter we could skate on the two ponds though the way the monks tested the ice was by getting one of the heavier boys and getting him to jump up and down on it while two monks held him.

- 54. One time brother MBU took a load of us up the Campsie hills. My wee pal fell off a cliff onto a load of rocks and had to be taken to hospital.
- 55. As far as chores were concerned I ended up using one of those big polishers which I could hardly push because of my size.
- 56. We were taken from St Ninian's to St John's Approved School on many occasions because they had a swimming pool there. We would be swimming about naked but there never seemed to be anybody supervising us though admittedly, since it was very dim light, maybe we just couldn't see them. Since we actually owned swimming trunks there was no need for us to be naked and I think that there were people there watching us in the dark swimming naked.
- 57. I heard that we were also used as guinea pigs for drugs. I can't say that that happened but we got cocoa every night. Was there something in it? Was that why I ended up in the wrong bed on two separate occasions?

Birthdays and Christmas

58. I don't recall Christmas or birthdays being celebrated. I think I was only in an institution the first year at Christmas. After that I would be at home

Visits/Inspections

59. I got monthly visits from mum if I was good. There were no visits from Social Workers or anything like that or if they did come they didn't speak to me. Many a time when my mum was there I saw her coming out of the headmaster's room in tears. Visits lasted about two or three hours and were on a Sunday afternoon.

Leaving the institution

- 60. When I left St Ninian's I went straight to secondary school where I joined up with many of the kids who I had been at primary with.
- 61. After I left St Ninian's I found being at home very strange. My dad had been in an accident in 1964 and his ankle had been crushed. He had received compensation and now owned a big Zephyr motor car. I wanted a new rig out for school and was hoping on the Saturday that my mum and dad would take me out to get me new clothes. Instead they dropped me off at the butchers with a pound to get some meat. I did a runner and went to Glasgow Central where I got the train to Gourock then the ferry to Dunoon.
- 62. I was walking round Dunoon and ended up at a petrol garage where I got talking to a guy who worked there. After a while he gave me some money and asked me to go get a something for him which I did. I went back and forth for him a few times. After a while a younger guy came in to take over the garage but as the older guy was finishing his shift I saw him put a lot of money into an envelope which he then put into a metal box.
- 63. After a while the younger guy asked me to look after the garage for a couple of minutes but as soon as he left I stole the envelope of money and ran off. I went to a shop and then to a cinema. In the cinema I went into the toilet and started counting the money. When I got to £25 I stopped counting but later realised I had stolen £130 which was an incredible amount of money in those days.
- I got the ferry back to Gourock then the train back to Glasgow and hung about there all day. I remember seeing a friend called who I gave a fiver to.

 About nine or ten at night I got a train to Edinburgh where I caught a taxi and asked the guy to take me to a hotel. Because of my age, I was only twelve or thirteen; none of the hotels would take me in. The taxi driver eventually wrote a note and told me to take it to his home address and show it to his wife. I ended up staying the night with them. I gave their kids a fiver in the morning.

- 65. I went back to Glasgow the next morning and even got on a mystery bus trip which ended up at Glamis Castle. The bus was full of pensioners. Somebody saw all the money I had and questioned me but I said my dad was rich. I later went back to Glasgow and again headed to Edinburgh. I ended up in a hostel but the woman there called the police because she was concerned about me.
- 66. The police found the money on me and took me to the police office after I admitted having stolen it. After I got caught I ended up in Bellfield Remand Home in Dumbarton. There were no beatings there and you were even allowed to smoke as long as your visitors left cigarettes for you. The food was great. That place was absolutely fine.

St Joseph's Tranent

67. I went back to St Ninian's with three of my mates mainly because I really liked the countryside there. However we went into a building site and wrecked the place and got caught. We ended up at Dunblane Court where I was charged with opening locked fast places. The other three got sent home and I got sent to Libertine remand home. There were girls as well as boys there though there was no interaction between them I did get hit a few times. I was there for a couple of weeks, maybe a month, and remember it was over I then got sent to St Joseph's. It was and I had just turned fourteen.

Routine

- 68. The routine at St Joseph's was very similar to St Ninian's though you weren't at church as often. You also learnt Latin and I could recite many of the prayers and hymns.
- 69. You got up and dressed yourself then went down and got breakfast. The food was fine. You would never get enough but that was because we were growing up.

70. After breakfast you would be in the play yard until the bell sounded and you went to class or gardening. By the time I was in the garden there was no more assaults on me.

Abuse

- 71. St Joseph's was a big old building with two cottages called North and South. I was in the big building. My number was ______. The house I was in was called Ninian's. Brother Michael was in charge of that house. I then got moved to North House. Brother was in charge there. Whenever you were in the shower he would sit and watch you. There were maybe twenty in the cottage and the beds were upstairs.
- 72. I remember seeing Miss MCR a female member of staff, snogging one of the boys.
- 73. Brother was called was called and could never control his anger. When he was battering you he would go into a mad frenzy and would have to be told by one of the others to stop battering you. He would batter you for nothing.
- 74. As I got older the assaults got less and less because I was getting bigger and could look after myself. I never did run away from St Joseph's.
- 75. They used to also take us to a military school to play football. People there would see cuts and bruises on us and ask who had hit us but we never told them.
- 76. Brother was the snr and used to take us bird watching. He would try and grope us but we were wise to him and made use of him as he used to give you dinner and sweets. Brother Benedict from St Ninian's went to St Joseph's but not when I was there.
- 77. Brother MJJ battered me a few times in St Joseph's. In St Ninian's Brother was my first monk teacher and he battered me the first week I was there.

- 78. If I was to be honest I would probably say I enjoyed the majority of my time at St Joseph's. I stopped my schooling at fourteen years and six months and joined the gardening party where I stayed till I left the place. That's probably what I enjoyed as I was outside and enjoyed the grafting. I was in St Joseph's for about a year.
- 79. They also took us berry picking in Carnoustie which was actually pretty good. The place was lovely and we not only got paid but you would eat as many strawberries as you could.
- 80. I would certainly say that I was treated better at St Joseph's than I was at St

 Ninian's. I remember as a prefect I would be at team meetings that would decide
 how many marks people would get, it was a position of importance. Since I was also
 marking myself sometimes it meant I was getting home more often at the weekends.

Polmont

- 81. I ended up in borstal at Polmont at the age of sixteen. I spent ten months there. I had actually been in Barlinnie prison on remand just before that. That was horrific. It was freezing and filthy. I think I would have committed suicide there if I could have. I was there because I think they were waiting for a space in Polmont. Polmont was brutal and when you got hit they hit you hard because you were treated as a grown up.
- 82. I actually tried to hang myself in Polmont but which wasn't very successful. But it did show how low I was feeling. The regime there was so precise. For instance when you got up in the morning all your clothing and bedding had to be folded in such a precise way. Some boys even used long bits of wood to ensure everything was lined up perfectly. If you weren't up and ready when the screws opened the door they would whack into you with a big wooden rod.
- 83. After dinner you would be back in your cell. You weren't allowed to lie on your bed but inevitably you'd be bored and would lie down but when a screw caught you that would be another beating. To avoid this I use to lie on the floor with my ear near it so I would hear if the screws were coming.

- 84. In what was called "The Block" you would get forced PE four times a day and in between it you would be scrubbing a floor, a big long corridor called "The Mile". The PE instructor always carried a big wooden pole and I remember seeing him breaking a guy's nose with it.
- 85. I was one of the youngest in Polmont if not the youngest. I had to look after myself because everyone was older and sometimes I would get picked on simply because I came from the wrong part of Glasgow. There was a big gang culture at the time.
- 86. Borstal was hard and quite often it was the screws that would instigate the trouble to get somebody a kicking.

Reporting of abuse

- 87. I have always talked about what happened and would tell anybody that would listen but have never tried to tell anybody in authority even when the story broke in the Sunday Mail. I tried to tell the local police in England but they weren't interested.
- 88. There are so many of those involved that have never been done for what they did.

 The only support I've ever had is going to chapel which I started doing when I last came out of prison when I was 37. Other than that I've never had nor sought any sort of support.

Life after the institution

89. Home life wasn't great after coming out of borstal and I ended up running away down to London at the age of seventeen. I was up and down between London and Glasgow until my early twenties when I eventually settled in London. It was only when I stopped drinking at 37 that I came to realise that I had a great family back in Glasgow.

90. As I got older I started to realise the effect I must have had on my family with the amount of times I had ended up in court. At no time during that part of my life did I consider how it had affected my brothers and sisters. Because of all the time I spent in remand homes I missed any sort of chance to bond with my young brother and I missed him growing up.

Impact

- 91. One of the main ways in which my life in the approved schools impacted on me was when I found out years later about the impact it had on my parents. I was on a bus coming back from a wedding with my brothers and sisters when they told me how it reminded them of the times they would return from visiting me with our mother.
- 92. They told me how my mum would have her face in her hands crying after visiting me and would still be upset when she got home. My brothers and sisters then told me that when they got home my father would be upset when he heard what was happening to me but that my mother would be saying that the priests wouldn't lie about such things.
- 93. My father clearly didn't believe the priests and thereafter wouldn't allow priests into our house. He even tried to get me into a protestant school when I left the approved schools. I didn't realise that my parents had been so affected and it upset me in later life to think I had caused them so much hurt.
- 94. I've never wanted money for this. I only got involved because I read in the press that the monks vehemently deny it happened. That's what got my back up. I wish I had been able to have my say in court about what happened. Brother Benedict got seven years then got another two years which was reduced to one year on appeal because of the stress he had endured waiting for the matter to go to trial. I was happy justice happened but I still didn't know why he did what he did.
- 95. While some have been charged with what happened in St Ninian's and St Joseph's many more have never been charged with anything. I've never heard of the likes of Brother or Brother getting done for what they did.

96.	They would lash into you for nothing and it almost became acceptable. Because of it	
	I have tried suicide as a result of depression and have had thoughts about killing	
	others because I just didn't care.	

- 97. My hope for the Inquiry is that the truth will come out and people will realise we're not liars.
- 98. I would be willing to give evidence at any future hearing.

Records

- 99. I have never tried to get my records. I didn't think they existed as I heard they had been destroyed.
- 100. 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.

	MBJ	400
Signed		
Dated	25-4-17	