

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

GPM

Support person present: No

1. My name is GPM. I have always been known by that name. My date of birth is 1960. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before going into care

2. I was born in Bonnybridge and lived at home with my mum, and my dad, I'm the second of four children. I had a brother, who was two years older than me. Sadly, he passed away five years ago from a brain tumour. I also have two younger sisters, and .
3. I had, what I thought, was quite a normal childhood. I had lovely grandparents on both my mum and dad's side and a lovely great-grandmother. However, once I got to about nine or ten years of age, I realised I didn't see much of my dad because he was out drinking. My dad's brother played in a band and my dad was like his roadie. That caused problems at home. I began to notice a lot of arguments. When I was ten, my dad had an affair and left. I was gutted because I always felt close to my dad. My mum and dad divorced in 1971 and my dad went on to have another son, who I've never met.
4. My siblings and I stayed with my mum, but she became a recluse after my dad left. She shut the curtains and hid herself away. She wouldn't go out of the house. We had to do all the shopping and things. Life at home was hard and my mum was having a really bad time. We had no money and often no electricity. We had the rent man and

the coal man chapping our door because my mum owed them money. We would be told to hide when someone came to the door.

5. My mum probably could have got help, but she didn't ask for it. She was a lovely, quiet, shy, gentle woman, but I think she just gave up on life. It became a really unstable environment living with her. My brother's behaviour didn't make it any easier. [REDACTED], was very intelligent, but he was also difficult and hyper. We discovered later in life that he actually had Asperger's Syndrome, but back in those days, it wasn't diagnosed.
6. I started to spend more and more time with my grandparents. One set lived in Falkirk and one in Bonnybridge. I would stay with them most weekends, but I always had to go back to this dark house, to my mum.
7. I was going to Bonnybridge Primary School, but my mum got used to having me around the house. I think it was easier for her because she wouldn't go out and she wanted some company. I didn't mind because I started getting bullied at school after my dad left. The bullies used to put sticks through the spokes of my bike. As an adult, I was able to look back at my school report cards and I couldn't believe how many absences I had the year my dad left. I'd say I had about one hundred absences that year.
8. When I started going to Denny High School, in 1972, the bullying got worse and worse. I got bullied for anything and everything, like the clothes I was wearing. It was just constant. I was getting beatings and it all got too much for me to take. I was off school a lot because my mum needed me and because of the bullying. I left school in second year in 1973. If that was my daughter, I wouldn't have let that happen, but my mum wasn't strong enough then to try to keep me in school.
9. Up until I stopped going to school, there was no social work involvement, but between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, I had two social workers, Mr Murphy and Ms Bickle. I told them about the bullying at school, but nothing was done to help me. That's when the children's panels started. I had numerous visits from social workers, numerous children's panels and supervision orders. My mum also had to go to court twice and

was fined for me not going to school. Eventually, the children's panel decided that I would be sent to Cardross Park Assessment Centre. It was a place for children who weren't disciplined or cared for at home. I wasn't told how long I'd be there. It was either [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] 1975 when I was taken there and I was there for three months.

### **Cardross Park Assessment Centre, Cardross**

10. Cardross Park had been open since 1967. It was an assessment centre for both boys and girls, but we were kept separate. I think all the kids there were between the ages on twelve and sixteen. It looked like a lovely big three story house, covered in ivy, from the outside.
11. On the ground floor, as you went in the front door, the girls' day room was on the left and the boys' day room was on the right. The toilets and showers were behind the day rooms. There was a kitchen and dining room at the back. There was a huge spiral staircase that took you up to the first and second floor where the dorms were. Again, the girls' dorms were on the left and the boys were on the right. There were maybe six girls in the big dorm room and two in the smaller one. I don't know how many boys were in each dorm. The only time we would see the boys was occasionally at mealtimes and if we were allowed to go outside to play, but that didn't happen very often.
12. I don't remember any of the staff by name. We called the woman in charge 'Miss' and I think she was in her fifties. I remember she wore her glasses on a chain. There was a heavy built woman, also in her fifties, who I think was the house mistress. She abused me while I was there. There was also a tall, thin woman who was verbally nasty. There were a couple of night shift staff who I thought were nice. One of them was a male member of staff and the other was a woman who would come in at night and give me a chocolate Brazil. The male staff tended to work with the boys and the female staff with the girls. There were kitchen staff and cooks, but I couldn't name or describe them.

13. The only residents I remember are the two girls who bullied and abused me. One was called [REDACTED] and the other was either called [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. I'm sure her surname was [REDACTED].

### **Routine at Cardross Park Assessment Centre**

#### *Arriving/First day*

14. When I was told by the children's panel that they were sending me to Cardross Park, I remember crying and clinging on to my mum. I ran and locked myself in the toilet, but a policeman came and got me out. Ms Bickle, the social worker, shoved me in a yellow mini and drove me to Cardross.
15. When I walked in, the first thing I noticed was that everything was grey; grey walls, grey floors, grey clothes, even the women who worked there had grey hair. The windows were all nailed shut. It wasn't homely at all. A heavy built woman, maybe in her fifties, came to see me, took me through to a room and told me to strip off. I was such a shy girl and didn't want to strip off in front of her. It was terrible and I got upset. Because I got upset, she manhandled me and took my clothes off. She checked my body and checked my head for lice. Then, she touched me inappropriately where she shouldn't have touched me. I have no idea why she would do that. She then gave me a set of clothes and told me to get dressed. I remember the trousers were too short, they were way up my legs. It was obviously in case you ran away, so you'd be spotted a mile off. Then, she put me in the day room with the other girls and locked the door.

#### *Mornings and bedtime*

16. In the morning, I was usually woken up by the two girls who bullied me. They would slap me across the face with a wet facecloth. After we got up, we made our beds, got washed, dressed and went down for breakfast. After breakfast we did our chores. We took turns at cleaning the pots and dishes and putting the potatoes in the big machine. Sometimes, we would have to polish the floors or the big staircase. I would often

volunteer to do extra chores because it kept me out of the day room and away from the other girls. Once we had finished our chores, we were locked in the day room. Very occasionally, we would be allowed to go outside where there was a set of boules.

17. We would eat lunch in the dining room and then be locked in the day room again. If you needed the toilet while you were in the day room, you had to knock on the door for a member of staff to take you. The staff would take you, watch you while you were in the toilet, and then lock you in the day room again. We would get out for dinner and then be locked in the day room until bedtime. We got one hour of TV after dinner and I remember watching Top of The Pops.
18. We had to shower every night before bed. Then, at around 07:00 or 08:00 pm we were sent upstairs. We had to wash our own pants and socks, in the sink, every night with carbolic soap. Once we were in our dorms, that was us for the night. We were locked in. I think there was a toilet in the dorm, so we didn't have to be let out.

#### *Mealtimes/Food*

19. I remember the food being like school dinners. There was a lot of soup. I would eat my breakfast because it was usually toast or porridge, which I didn't mind. If it was meat, sometimes I would eat it, sometimes I wouldn't. I didn't like fat. You weren't forced to eat if you didn't want to, but you would be punished for not eating and left to go hungry. The staff would slap you on the head. If you caused a fuss, you were stripped naked and put in what we called 'the cooler'. It was a passageway between the day room and the dining room. The lights would be turned out and the only piece of furniture in there was a wooden bench, like a church pew.
20. At mealtimes, the two bullies would shove my face in my food or spit on my food. You're not going to eat food that someone has spat on. I remember once, when we were given tapioca, they told me it was 'spunk' and tried to make me eat it. I was so naive, I had no idea what they meant. They thought it was funny that I didn't know what they were talking about.

### *Washing/bathing*

21. The girls washed in a communal shower room. There were no cubicles or curtains. I absolutely hated it because I was so shy and reserved about my body. I think I got that from my mum. I hated having to take my clothes off in front of people. I was never allowed to shower by myself.

### *Clothing/possessions*

22. All of my clothes were provided by the staff at Cardross Park. When I arrived, my clothes from home were taken from me and I was given a set of clothes and either a set of pyjamas or a nightdress. I was also given a pair of old black gutties. As far as I remember, I only had the one set of clothes the whole time I was there. I had absolutely nothing of my own. In our dorm rooms, we had a little bedside cabinet at the side of our bed, but I never had anything to put in it.

### *Leisure time*

23. There really wasn't any leisure time. The only thing we got was one hour of TV after dinner and on a rare occasion, we got to go outside for a little while. That was it. The staff never took us out anywhere. I can't even remember there being any toys or games in the day room. I think there were maybe a few books we could read, but I spent most of my days sitting looking out a window.

### *Schooling*

24. I had no schooling whatsoever while I was at Cardross Park.

### *Healthcare*

25. I didn't see a nurse, doctor or dentist during my time there. There wasn't even a health check when I arrived. The only thing that happened, the day I arrived, was the house mistress checked my head for lice.

### *Religious instruction*

26. I don't remember there being any religious element at Cardross Park and they didn't make us go to church.

### *Birthdays and Christmas*

27. I was there for my fifteenth birthday, but there was no celebration or recognition of my birthday at all. It was just like any other day.

### *Bed Wetting*

28. I wet the bed a few times while I was at Cardross Park. It was something that happened quite a lot at home too. I don't think it happened as often at Cardross because I was too scared to sleep soundly, so most of the time, I was able to get up and go to the toilet through the night.
29. On the occasions when I did wet the bed, the house mistress would thump me and the other girls would call me a baby. I was made to wash my sheets in the big sink in the wash room. I remember the soap would sting my hands. Sometimes, if I wet the bed, I would try to hide it. I would make my bed up in the morning and, if none of the staff checked, I'd get back into a wet bed that night. There were other times, when I hadn't wet the bed, the two bullies would pour water on me to make it look like I had.

### *Social Work/External Inspections*

30. I didn't see a social worker while I was there and as far as I know, there weren't any external inspections or reviews of my care.

### *Family contact*

31. I didn't have any contact with my siblings while I was at Cardross Park, but my mum came to visit me around three times. She would bring me sweets, but these were

always stolen by the other girls. She had to make an appointment to visit me. She would come on the train, which obviously cost money. I guess that's why she didn't visit more often.

32. When my mum visited, we had to sit on seats outside the day room. Once, she was allowed to take me out and we walked down, over the railway bridge, to the shore. I wrote to my mum once. The staff would check our letters before sending them. If they didn't like what we had written, they just wouldn't send the letter. When my brother died, my sister found the letter I'd sent to my mum. It was strange to read it again and I felt like it was a very adult letter for a young girl to write. It didn't say anything about what was happening to me in Cardross Park. I never told my mum any of it. In fact, I never told anyone about the abuse until after my mum passed away.

#### *Discipline*

33. The discipline at the assessment centre was quite cruel. The staff would shout at us, slap us and put us in 'the cooler', sometimes for hours on end. There were occasions where kids would be stripped and put in the cooler naked. I seem to remember being made to clean the stairs with a toothbrush once. It was a punishment for something, but I quite enjoyed it because it meant I was away from the other girls. Also, there was a miner bird, which was kept at the bottom of the stairs, and I enjoyed talking to it.

#### *Running away*

34. There were lots of times I wanted to make a run for it. There were times when I saw the kitchen door open and I was really tempted, but I knew I'd be found and dragged back, so I didn't. I saw other kids running away. When they were brought back, they would be put in 'the cooler' for hours. I saw some of the boys being brought back by the police. They would be fighting with the police and getting dragged up the driveway.



## **Abuse at Cardross Park Assessment Centre**

35. During my time at Cardross Park, I just tried to keep myself to myself, but it didn't work. I was picked on and abused by some of the female staff. I was also abused and bullied relentlessly by two of the resident girls. One was called [REDACTED] and the other one was either called [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] had dark, spikey hair and was the more streetwise of the two. The other girl was blonde and big built. She looked like a grown woman. I think they were both around fifteen or sixteen years old.
36. The abuse started the moment I arrived and was taken by the heavy built, female staff member, and told to strip off. She manhandled me and touched me inappropriately. She was the house mistress. She had dark curly hair and I thought she looked like a farmer's wife. On other occasions, the same woman took me into the communal showers and scrubbed me with a hard brush. She did that because I didn't want to undress in front of the other girls in the shower room. The girls would laugh at me and make fun of me because I wasn't developed. That woman scrubbed me like that regularly. It didn't happen every day, because she wasn't in every day, but it happened several times while I was there.
37. I realised that the two girls who bullied me were in cahoots with the house mistress. She would treat them differently and give them sweets and things. She let one of them wear her own clothes when no one else got to. She would also encourage them to ridicule me and would laugh along with them. I came to describe them as 'Miss and her henchgirls'.
38. The verbal abuse from these two bullies was constant. I could be sitting minding my own business and have my hair grabbed and be dragged across the floor for no reason. The attacks were daily. I would be punched, kicked, slapped and have my hair pulled. I would be sitting by myself in the day room, looking out of the window, and I would see these two girls planning their attack.
39. On one occasion, the girls were making fun of me because I didn't have my period yet. I didn't know what a period was so I asked them. They then shoved a used sanitary

pad in my mouth. On another occasion these two girls dragged me over the floor and scraped a comb down my face. The house mistress heard the commotion and came in to find me lying on the floor. She didn't say anything to the two girls, but I was put in 'the cooler'.

40. The two girls who bullied me would regularly shout obscenities through the wall to the boys' dorm. It was sexual stuff. I didn't know what it meant at the time, but I do now. There was one boy, called [REDACTED], from Falkirk. I know he was in and out of jail for years, but he's dead now. He seemed to be the one they were shouting to. He seemed to know one of the girls.
41. One night, when we were in the dorm, these two bullies were shouting to the boys through the wall. They were telling them that 'we have a wee virgin in here'. They then said 'she won't be one for long'. They did something sexual to me. I don't know exactly what they did, but it hurt, and afterwards, they said I wasn't a virgin anymore. The sexual abuse by these two bullies didn't stop there. When I was in my bed, in the dorm, they would regularly lift my covers, hold me down, touch me inappropriately and call me dirty. They would shout to the boys and tell them what they were doing to me. It was funny to them, but it certainly wasn't funny to me. It was complete humiliation because I was fourteen years old, but I had the mind and body of a nine year old.
42. It was just relentless. These two girls continued attacking me, pouring water on my bed, making fun of me, laughing at me, humiliating me, spitting in my food and pushing my face in my food. The staff must have been aware of what was going on. The house mistress certainly was, but instead of punishing them, she laughed along with them, encouraged them and rewarded them.

### **Leaving Cardross Park Assessment Centre**

43. One day, out of the blue, one of the staff came and told me that I was going home. They gave me my clothes back, that I came in with, and my mum came to pick me up. I remember getting the train home with her and she took me to buy records because

she had missed my birthday. Although I had only been at Cardross Park for three months, it felt like I had been there for years.

### **Life after being in care**

44. When I got home, I didn't tell anyone what had happened to me at Cardross Park. I just hid myself away. I ate, slept and spent my time in a cupboard in order to feel safe. It was all a reaction to what I experienced. My mum never questioned my behaviour. I did that for years. Right up until I was in my fifties, if I felt stressed, I'd hide myself at the bottom of a cupboard. That only stopped when I started to get help to cope with what I had been through.
45. I don't remember any social work involvement when I got home. I started going to Camelon High School, but that was only for a short time until I was old enough to leave school at sixteen. It was around the same time I moved in with my gran and grandpa. It was my choice. I asked to live with them. Life at home with my mum and siblings was difficult, particularly because of my brother's behaviour. After I moved in with my grandparents, life was completely different for me. It was normal.
46. Sadly, my dad died in a horrific accident when I was seventeen. He was badly burned at work. I always deeply regretted that I never got to know him again.
47. I got a part-time job at the Co-op before I left school. I would work a Friday and Saturday night. After I left school, I started working there full-time. I worked at the Co-Op for a while, then I went to Falkirk College to do secretarial stuff and I was also working as a nanny for a friend's kids. At the age of twenty-two, I worked in a library until I had my daughter. Afterwards, I was a crèche worker for Falkirk Council and I was also a child minder for many years. I just loved caring for and nurturing kids.
48. I did go back to Cardross Park as an adult. It has been turned into private residences. The front door was the same, the day room door was the same, but the big spiral

staircase had been replaced. I always remembered there being a big stained glass window and that was still there.

### **Impact**

49. As an adult, I've struggled with various mental health difficulties, including depression. I've also struggled to have successful adult relationships. I just don't know how to have a normal relationship. I suffered a lot of abuse in relationships and I was raped constantly by my daughter's dad. I brought my daughter up by myself. She has two degrees, two children and a lovely house so I must have done something right.
50. My education is also something that suffered as a result of everything I went through. I left school with no qualifications and had to educate myself. My daughter can't believe how bright I am, despite not really having much formal education at all. I went back to Denny High School, as an adult student, and studied various modules, including word processing. I also got my English O'Grade at the age of twenty-six.

### **Treatment/support**

51. I was allocated a Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN), called Martha, after my mum died. I've been seeing her now for twenty-two years. She now works as a Psychotherapist. I've discussed with her what I went through at Cardross Park and she put me in touch with a couple of survivor groups. I went for counselling at Open Secret and I started going to In Care Survivors meetings, in Stirling, on a Monday. I went to the survivor groups for a while, but I haven't been since my granddaughter was born, because I help with her childcare. I still see my CPN fortnightly and I'd like to get back in touch with the survivor groups.
52. I have received numerous treatments and therapies over the years, including Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprogramming (ERDM). It is form of psychotherapy to help with the distress caused by traumatic memories. I was referred to a Psychiatrist

by my CPN. He diagnosed me with Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I have also been diagnosed with Social Anxiety and Social Phobia.

53. As part of the survivor's groups, I was invited to speak about my experience in care at the Scottish Government, [REDACTED]. She was actually in tears after hearing everything I went through.

### **Records**

54. I would like to see my records from my time in care. I've spoken to Open Secret about recovering my records, but I think a lot it has gone missing from Cardross Park. I've also been in contact with Redress. I have to provide them with some kind of proof that I was in Cardross Park. There must be some record of the children's panel sending me there. I am going to contact Future Pathways to see if they can recover anything for me.

### **Lessons to be Learned**

55. I came forward to talk to the Inquiry because the things that happened to me, shouldn't be allowed to happen to anyone else. Kids shouldn't be treated like that. If you are placed in care, you should be cared for. I think the social work department need to carry out regular checks on the kids they put in care and ensure they have support and get a good education. I also think that there should be a process for keeping each child's records securely.
56. People need to know what has gone on, so it can be stopped. I want everyone who has had a similar experience to me, to be able to come forward and tell their story. That is what I think the Inquiry gives to those who have had been in the care system. It gives us a voice and an opportunity to be heard.

**Other information**

57. 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.....  .....

Dated..... 30.8.22 .....