

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Clare FINDLAY

Support person present: No

1. My name is Jeanne Clare Findlay. [REDACTED] I have always just been known as Clare. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1942 . My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. When I married my husband [REDACTED] in 1976 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. We then had John Findlay on [REDACTED] 1977. He was a son that we both really wanted. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] He was born in East Sussex where we were living at the time. John was a particularly bright young boy and was great fun to be around.
3. One time when he was six he brought homework home and he did more than he needed to. The following day the headmistress pulled me in and told me that I must not help John with his homework. I assured her that I hadn't but she didn't believe me. I was so annoyed and I wanted to prove her wrong that I arranged for John to see a child psychologist. John went to see him and a report was compiled. The report concluded that although John was six, he had a mathematical mental age of a ten year old. I still have this report. We moved to Scotland when John was seven years old. [REDACTED] was offered a new job so we moved to Morayshire to follow his work.

Aberlour House Boarding School

4. The decision to send John to Aberlour was easy for us. [REDACTED] had originally lived near there and had been educated at both Aberlour and then Gordonstoun. He had a very high opinion of the school and it had an excellent reputation. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Toby Coghill was the headmaster and his wife was called Gay.
5. John would still have been seven when he first started at Aberlour. He initially went as a boarder because the house we were moving into was getting work done and it wasn't quite ready for us to move in. I know that in that period when he was boarding John missed us because we visited him and he was extremely upset when we left. When our house was ready John moved back home with us and became a day pupil. He only boarded for the first term. He then remained a day pupil until he was ten. At that stage John felt he was missing out on things as a day pupil so at his request he became a boarder again.
6. John had many friends at school and often brought friends home. He was also doing well academically. He was average in most subjects but was brilliant in mathematics. One of his friends taught him computing which wasn't on the syllabus. He was a happy, normal child. We were only a twenty minute drive away from the school. [REDACTED] sometimes did cricket coaching and I occasionally did tennis coaching. John was brought up in a balanced way. I helped him with some things and if I couldn't, [REDACTED] could. He was a very lucky child and [REDACTED]
he was brought up with all our attention [REDACTED]

Disclosure by John of abuse

7. When John was twelve I was driving him back to school after he had been home for the weekend. [REDACTED] must have been working away from home. The radio was on but I can't actually recall what was on. John made a comment that he knew how she felt in response to something on the radio. I asked him what he was talking about and

that was when he told me. He said that one of the school masters, Derek Jones, an English and drama teacher, had come into his dorm inappropriately late during the night and had fiddled with his private parts. I can't recall exactly how much he told me in the car and what I learned later on. He was upset and was crying in the car.

8. John told me he had a very sore foot as he had been wearing boots that were too small for him earlier during the day in a rugby match. He was in a lot of pain when he was in his bed. He went to speak to Derek Jones who told him he wasn't supposed to but gave him some pain killers to take. John had then gone back to his bed and a while later Derek Jones appeared. John said he was very sleepy and strangely found that he couldn't move any part of his body. He believed he had been paralysed by the tablets. Derek Jones had his camera and he pulled back the sheets and his pyjama bottoms and took photographs of his private parts.
9. John told me when he was able to move again that he went, with [REDACTED] to Derek Jones' room and confronted him. Derek Jones told John that he had made it all up and must have been dreaming.
10. I assume that this incident had possibly only happened the week before and John was just waiting for an opportune moment to tell me. I was really upset when he told me. I asked John if he was able to go back to the school as I wanted to discuss the next course of action with his father. John said he was and I dropped him off as usual. I burst into tears and I was shaking. When I left him I needed to speak to someone so I popped in to see Toby Coghill and his wife Gay. Toby was no longer the headmaster of the school. David Hanson was the temporary headmaster and had taken over from Mr Head.
11. The week after the incident with John and Derek Jones, Mrs YXP [REDACTED] a teacher and friend of Derek Jones, ridiculed John. In front of all the other children in the classroom she told them that Mr Jones had lost his job, all because of a story that John had made up. She said John was a liar. John was really upset by this and it was completely out of order for her to do this. After this a lot of the boys assumed that in fact John had

been willing and they called him 'homo'. John subsequently beat up the ringleader of the group who were calling him this to try and stop it.

12. Looking back there was a previous thing with Derek Jones which I felt was wrong. Derek Jones had earmarked John to play Widow Twankey in the school pantomime, Aladdin. In one of John's parts he was to throw his jacket open suggestively and ask if anyone had seen his qualifications. It was a smutty joke and I found it quite inappropriate. I let it go because experience taught me that to make an issue of it could rebound on John.

Reporting of abuse while at Aberlour

13. I told Toby and Gay Coghill what John had told me and they were brilliant. Toby was shocked and wanted to call the police but I told him I wanted to speak to [REDACTED] first. I subsequently told [REDACTED] and that week, with John, he went to see David Hanson, the temporary headmaster. John explained to him what had happened. I am not sure if Derek Jones was still working at the school by the time [REDACTED] went to see David Hanson. After the meeting [REDACTED] came home and either he or David Hanson contacted the police. I assume John gave them a statement.
14. I don't think the people in authority at Aberlour, who were aware of what happened to John, dealt with it appropriately and did not help John when he was at his most vulnerable and experiencing considerable hurt and emotion.

Aberlour reaction to abuse

15. We subsequently received a letter from Mr Barr who was the bursar for Aberlour and Gordonstoun. He was the official person who dealt with the finances and had a great interest in maintaining the reputation of the schools. He wanted to know if we were taking the matter to court. Mr Barr lavishly explained that Derek Jones was not at the school anymore and there was no way he would ever teach again. [REDACTED] was

concerned what it would do to the school because he had a great loyalty to Gordonstoun and we also didn't really want John to have to go to a public court. We felt, at that time that, if he never taught again that was punishment enough. We decided not to proceed with criminal charges.

Aberlour to Gordonstoun

16. John carried on at Aberlour after the Derek Jones incident but it was made very difficult because of what Mrs YXP had said to the class about John being a liar. This was approaching the end of his time at Aberlour and he was sitting his exam to go on to Gordonstoun so we didn't make a fuss about what Mrs YXP did. I don't think we followed this up with the school.

Abuse at Gordonstoun

17. John would have been about thirteen at Gordonstoun when he got incredibly drunk. It seems it was traditional for the sixth formers to sell drink to the younger boys. John had bought a half bottle from them and had drunk the whole lot. He was in a terrible state. This was probably the start of John becoming an alcoholic. The damage had been done by Derek Jones and it made it easy for him to become an alcoholic because of the ethos of the sixth formers making an extra penny or two by selling alcohol to the thirteen year olds.

Impact of abuse on John

18. John, as a young boy, was happy and great fun to be around. When he told me about the incident with Derek Jones he was visibly upset and became quite unhappy. I saw a deterioration in him after that. The next thing to happen was when Mrs YXP stood up in the class and told everyone that John had made Derek Jones lose his job and

that John was a liar. John told me about this after she had said this in class. He was really upset.

19. When John moved to Gordonstoun he had friends there who had been friends with him at Aberlour. What happened and the changes in John didn't really affect his relationship with his friends. He never really had any steady relationships with females. Unfortunately, after he left school, his alcohol addiction ended some of his relationships with females. When he married, his wife was already pregnant, but because of his drinking she threw him out before the child was born. John met another woman and they had another child. Their relationship never lasted. [REDACTED] and I have never met either of these children. [REDACTED] my husband, was heartbroken by that. John has no contact with his children.
20. I saw John's potential to succeed being absolutely torn to shreds by what happened to him at Aberlour. It was made worse by what Mrs YXP [REDACTED] said in the class calling him a liar. I saw a lot of small changes in John. He became very angry about small things. Things that he regarded as unfair. He hated being disagreed with. I had to be very careful how I spoke to him. I saw him change from a happy young boy to a person I barely recognised. He has always been, and still is, very loving and caring towards me. I have always tried to make things as easy as possible for him. I try to show him that I am a maker not a breaker. I got involved taking in Bosnian refugees two years after the incident at Aberlour so I had a lot to cope with at that time. I spent a lot of time and energy dealing with John. The only good thing from John's point of view, although he has never said so, is that he realises that I understand what he has gone through and what it has done to him.
21. The rest of the family only ever saw and heard about the bad side of John. They didn't take on board or understand the reason that he was behaving the way he was. They were very critical of him.
22. John didn't go to university straight after school. It would have been a complete waste of time and money. He scraped through at Gordonstoun with one A level. There is no

doubt that his academic achievements were affected by what happened at Aberlour. He tried his best but the teachers always commented that he could do better.

23. Alcoholism became quite a problem for John. He found solace in alcohol and used it as a crutch. He became a complete monster when he had been drinking. He did some ghastly things when he was drunk. One time, when he was around twenty, he came home late after being out drinking in Elgin. I asked why he was so late and he just replied aggressively calling me appalling names. I slapped him when he called me a whore. In the morning the police arrived as he had contacted them about being assaulted by me. They did not entertain his complaint and they left. His use of drink as a crutch continued throughout his life. He now drinks far less.
24. John also smokes like a chimney and has badly damaged his lungs. He has had to have a lot of one of his lungs removed. I fear that the damage he has done to his body through alcohol will catch up with him. I don't expect that he is going to outlive me but I hope so. The thought of this fills me with fear and anger. Anger at the people at Aberlour and Gordonstoun that have caused this damage to John. John had so much good in him and so much potential.
25. John at some point got involved in drugs through some locals. When he was nineteen or twenty he was stopped by the police and caught in possession of ecstasy. We hoped that John would get a fright at this and would learn a lesson. I am not sure that he didn't do it again.
26. John was scarred by what happened in Aberlour. He tried to hide it and he managed to hide it quite well. He has become stronger in many ways over the years in dealing with what went on but he still holds a lot of anger inside him. There is also a fear and confusion inside him that he has never been able to deal with. I know this from being his mother. John still has emotional periods and even now breaks down in tears. He is strong and is still fighting. He is badly hurt from that time at Aberlour when he was very vulnerable.

27. We never really had a sit down conversation with John when he was at Aberlour and Gordonstoun about why he wasn't achieving as much as we knew he was capable of. We had occasional conversations but John hated discussing it because it reminded him of that very bad experience. I don't remember one particular conversation with John, it was an ongoing thing with us trying to communicate with him but John was reluctant to talk about it.
28. He decided to go to university at the age of 28. I paid for him to do a two year law degree course at Buckingham university. John also went to college in Elgin where he did an IT course. He was top of his class. John has always been aware of his shortcomings, which are however, not a clear reflection of his true abilities.
29. We heard about ten years ago that Derek Jones had gone to teach at a school in Essex and possibly a school on the Isle of Man. I am not sure how we heard this. Apparently he left both these places under a cloud. John was very upset when he heard that. He took a real down turn and it badly affected him.

Lessons to be Learned

30. There is no doubt that there have been massive changes in the thirty to forty years between my husband [REDACTED] and son John going to Gordonstoun. The main thing is there has been a major lowering of standards. I also think a lot had changed in relation to the regime and priorities at Aberlour and Gordonstoun. There has been a growing tolerance for things that are intolerable. People always make excuses if someone says things that are bad or does something that is wrong. There is a definite lowering of quality provided by the schools. What Mrs YXP [REDACTED] did by telling the class in front of John that he was a liar would not have been acceptable in [REDACTED] time.
31. I think Brian Head was the headmaster at the time and he brought Derek Jones to Aberlour. I think he liked him and that is how he got the job. I am not sure how someone like him, who hadn't been properly investigated, managed to get a job at Aberlour and then apparently turned into a paedophile. What made it much worse was the fact that

he then went on and managed to work at other schools despite what happened with John. They knew what happened and they still let him go and work somewhere else despite the assurances they gave us that he would never teach again.

32. I believe that any institution with children in their responsibility and care, from ages three up to eighteen, must have a cast iron interview policy. All potential staff must go through a fool proof process to ensure it is safe for them to work with children, and that they are suitable and appropriate. Their background must be thoroughly investigated and they should have a tried and tested past history and have trusted people who can recommend and support the individual's application. The interview team themselves must be above reproach. I have no idea what level of vetting or background checks were done on the staff when John went to Aberlour. I don't think it would ever have occurred to me to ask.
33. I support strong sentencing where a person is found guilty of a terrible crime. They must be given a heavy sentence which is a deterrent to others.
34. I went to boarding school as a child, as did [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. With hindsight I wouldn't have sent any of my children to boarding school. I just don't approve of it.

Other information

35. About three or four years ago we spoke with lawyers representing Gordonstoun and the headmaster of Gordonstoun. I think this was on the back of John speaking to the Observer newspaper about the incident at Aberlour and an article being published. During this discussion they said that they would easily pay for any help or counselling that John might need and they had people who dealt with that sort of thing. Despite these promises nothing ever happened. I think it was just an exercise for show. At this point I stopped trusting Gordonstoun.

- 36. About two years ago John supported two of his friends who had been at Gordonstoun at court. They were appearing to give evidence against Andrew Keir who had been charged and appeared at Elgin Sheriff Court.
- 37. My husband [REDACTED] died in 2016. [REDACTED] had great difficulty accepting how John turned out.
- 38. 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... [REDACTED]

Dated... 12th June, 2019