

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

ABT

Support person present: Yes, daughter

1. My name is ABT. My date of birth is 1953. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was brought up with my siblings and . We stayed with my parents in Paisley in a ground floor maisonette. My older sister was brought up by my grandmother.
3. Our house had three bedrooms, mum and dad had the first room, and I shared a room and my older brothers the third room.
4. My father worked as a foundry worker and my mother was a conductress on the local buses. When I was about five years old my parents split up. My mother moved to England and left us in the care of my father.
5. My father could not cope with looking after us and for a while my aunt and my uncle moved into the house to help out. This lasted for a short period until aunt became ill and then a friend of our family, attempted to carry out this role, again without success.
6. I attended St Anne's Infant School and did not settle and sometimes I would fall asleep in the class. I believe a neighbour upstairs heard my father getting more and more angry with us as he was not coping or looking after us and along with the problems at school, reported this to the Social Work Department.

Smyllum Park, Lanark

7. We were in our house around tea time, possibly during school holidays, when two social workers arrived at the house. They told us my mother was not coming back and we were being taken away to be looked after at a better place. They told us we would be kept together at the new place. This was when I was about five years old. I had already started in primary school and think it was during the holidays when we were moved.

Routine at Smyllum Park

First day

8. The social workers transported us to Smyllum Park in a small A40 white coloured van. We thought it was going to be a new adventure and we still hoped we were going to see our mother. The only clothes we had were the ones we were wearing.
9. On arrival I saw this massive building and was a bit scared. As soon as we were handed over to the nuns, the social workers left and we never saw them or any of their colleagues again.
10. Against what we were told by the social workers about keeping us together, I was separated from my brothers right away. The boys were taken away by one nun and I was taken away by Sister AFU
11. I was taken to the bathrooms and she forcibly took the clothes off me. She then made sure I was put in a hot bath, washed. I was scrubbed really hard with the carboloc soap. She cut my finger and toe nails and then cut my hair short.
12. When she took me to the dormitory she told me to forget about my brothers because I wouldn't be seeing them while I was at Smyllum. The more I asked about my brothers the more she got angry.

13. Sister [REDACTED] AFU took me to the dining hall and put a plate in front of me. It was the first time I saw spaghetti. I had never eaten this before and thought it was worms. She told me I was to eat it but I refused. She forced a large spoon into my mouth for me to eat. I was still trying to refuse and she grabbed me by the arm and forced the spoon into my mouth. I was retching so much she eventually gave up. She was slapping me on each arm to try and make me eat it.
14. There were between twelve and sixteen beds in the dormitory and Sister [REDACTED] AFU slept in the room situated near the door.
15. The girls were all in their beds when I got to the dormitory. They were still awake at this time but speaking. I was made to lie with my hands clasped to the side of my head or to lie on my back with my hands crossed across my chest. If Sister [REDACTED] AFU found anyone sleeping in a different position she would hit you, until you learned to do as you were told.
16. I later learned some of the girls managed to avoid punishments from Sister [REDACTED] AFU as she liked some of them. They would be allowed to grow their hair long and were never punished as we were.
17. The first night when Sister [REDACTED] AFU went to her room I got out of the bed to look out of the window. I was trying to see if I could see my brothers. The other girls were telling me to go back to bed as Sister [REDACTED] AFU they told me I would be murdered if I was caught. They were really anxious for me.
18. As I looked out the window I saw a man with a cart. As he emerged from the cart I saw this man carrying something into the field I could not see what he was carrying but I think it was larger than a dog. Whatever he was carrying he dumped in the field. I was always scared this was him dumping a body.

Mornings and bedtime

19. The next morning I woke to find for the first time in my life I had wet the bed. Sister **AFU** saw the mess and dragged me out of bed and made me take the sheets with me. She made me stand still in front of everyone. I was taken to the bathroom and told to wash the bed sheets in the small basin. Every time the water spilled out of the basin she hit me again.
20. Every morning we were woken about six o'clock. We got washed and were dressed in our good clothes to attend church. After church it was back to the dormitory, change into school clothes, which were more scruffy, and then down to the dining room for breakfast. After playing in afternoon we went to the dining hall for tea and were in bed for 7.30pm.

Food

21. The only thing I remember about food at Smyllum was you ate what you were given. As in the first day if there was anything I did not like or not eaten before, I would try and avoid it. Sister **AFU** would use the spoon or a ladle and force feed me. She was always in my vision and any time I caught her eye she took that as an excuse to slap me and threaten to hit me on the knuckles with the ladle. If she could not hit you on the knuckles she would aim for your legs. Eventually I learned to eat the food whether I liked it or not. It saved me from her abuse.

Bathing

22. We were given a bath once every two weeks. There were only a couple of baths and we took turns to use it. The water was not changed. Sister **AFU** would scrub us with the carbolic soap and check our hair with a nit comb and cut our nails.

23. These routines were drilled in to me for the first couple of months after arriving. Everybody was aware of the routine but as I was the new girl I had to accept the punishments.

School

24. Our school was within the grounds and the only kids that went there were the residents. The older kids went to the school in the town.
25. When we finished school between 3.30pm and 4.00pm we went to church. After church we were to play in the cobbled yard. The only thing was, there was nothing there to play with apart from a broken roundabout.
26. At school there was a metal fence separating the boys from the girls. I used this time to try and speak to my brothers. It was one of the few times we could speak together. I would spend any free time I could to speak with them and I would even forego using the bathroom.
27. During the day you were limited as to the number of occasions you could use the toilet. Sister **AFU** restricted your bathroom time to wakening up, prior to school, lunchtime, tea time and before going to bed.
28. If you wanted to go outwith her restrictions she would make you stand and wait. All the others were allowed to use the toilet before me. She warned me that if I was to allow one drop of pee out she would hit me for my troubles. One time I missed going to the bathroom so I could speak to my brothers and wet myself. Not only did Sister **AFU** hit me but I was given the strap at school by Sister **BAH** the headmistress.
29. There was never any happiness with the nuns and the only time we saw the priests was when at church after school and on Saturdays and Sundays.

30. One day I managed to sneak out of the dormitory and heard noises coming from one of the rooms. When I looked through the keyhole I saw many of the nuns and priests within and they were all laughing and having fun.
31. I never thought of nuns wearing items like brassieres. One day I approached Sister [REDACTED] AFU to ask her if I could use the bathroom. I thought as I approached her she was looking at a dirty book, but I later found out it was a catalogue. I asked her if I could go to the bathroom and I was immediately struck by her. I am not sure if it was just for asking or if it was because I startled her.

Holidays

32. The only time I was allowed out was one day around Easter time. We wore pyjamas and went on a parade through the town. I was around seven years old at the time.

Birthdays and Christmas

33. At Christmas my great uncle [REDACTED] gave us all presents. My brothers and I were shown the presents on Christmas day and we were allowed to play with them for a while that day. After he left the presents were removed and we never saw them again.
34. If any of the presents were dolls or similar we were told not to remove the clothes from them and we had to ensure none of the presents were damaged in any way.

Visits/Inspections

35. There were no formal visits or inspections while I stayed at Smyllum. The only visit was from great uncle [REDACTED]. He visited us about once a month and made lots of donations to the church. As a result they allowed him to visit us at the home. He was also allowed to take us out of the church but not out of the grounds. The nuns still put restrictions on us and we were not allowed to speak to Uncle [REDACTED] about anything at the home. He was to be kept in the dark about how we were treated.

36. On one occasion he gave me a hat with pom poms. I used to swing them about as I shook my head. When I came back from his visit Sister [REDACTED] AFU [REDACTED] cut them off. At his next visit uncle [REDACTED] asked what happened to the hat. I couldn't tell him she cut them off and just told him they must have fallen off.
37. Sometimes Uncle [REDACTED] left money for us at the home. This meant we were able to buy some sweeties on a Saturday. If he did not leave any money then there were no treats.
38. At one point uncle [REDACTED] wanted me to join the local Brownies and he persuaded the nuns to allow me to go, but I only went once, twice at most. I was in the gnomes. Sister [REDACTED] AFU [REDACTED] was so scared I was going to tell someone of the abuse and how unhappy we were at Smyllum. She eventually stopped me going. Although I stopped attending Sister [REDACTED] AFU [REDACTED] told me to pretend to Uncle [REDACTED] that I was still going.

Healthcare

39. I did not have any health issues while I was at Smyllum. The only time I needed anything was when I was stung by bees. In the cobbled play area there was always bees and the other girls regularly got stung, but I managed to avoid them.

Chores

40. We had to scrub the floorboards of the dormitory and this would be done every weekend. We were given polish to finish the floors. The cloths we used were all hessian type. We were always getting splinters on our knees from the hessian. The girls from the dormitory were allocated this on a rota basis. We were not allowed to clean the dishes in the kitchen. That was a chore kept for older children. I was given a treat once where I was allowed to shell the peas from the garden.

Abuse at Smyllum Park

41. Sister [REDACTED] AFU would regularly grab me by the hair and drag me around the rooms. Her usual method was to use the ladle and wooden spoons to grab us by the arms and hit us over the knuckles, arms and legs.
42. The whole day from the moment you woke until the time you went to bed you were disciplined. I felt like I was targeted by Sister [REDACTED] AFU the entire length of time I stayed at Smyllum.

Leaving Smyllum Park

43. Around Christmas when I was about ten years old we were taken out of Smyllum with various aunts and uncles and later gathered at my grandmother's house in Paisley. She told us my mother was on her way from her home in England and we would be staying with her. She arrived at the house with a well-dressed man, but we did not recognise her. We all boarded a coach and moved to England.

Reporting of abuse at Smyllum Park

44. We never had any visits at Smyllum from social workers or any other professionals and had no opportunity to report anything to them. Even after I left Smyllum and to this date I have not reported anything to the authorities.

Life after being in care

45. Life with my step father was not good. My mother had a boy with him. I stayed with them in Salford until I was about seventeen. While I stayed with them I was made to clean his many boarding houses and would have to baby sit for him. He would call us his "Scottish heathens".
46. The priest from the catholic school I attended was always asking for money and donations and as a result I was moved on to a different school. Initially I did well at

school but I lost interest as I was treated different because of being Scottish. I left school when I was about fourteen.

47. I had many jobs as I grew up and worked at making lamp shades and also for a van hire company.
48. I got engaged when I was about sixteen and married my first husband at nineteen. I married him as he was over six foot tall, a rugby player and did not drink or smoke too much. I believed if I was with him I would be protected.
49. My marriage broke down when I was around twenty two. I previously suffered from post natal depression after the birth of my first child. I left my eldest son with my husband and his parents
50. I continued working in many places including the catering industry. During my spare time I tried to see my son as much as possible. I could not build a relationship with him because I was scared to love him. This was a result of how I was brought up in Smyllum, where I was scared to have a close or emotional contact with anyone.
51. I married again and had two children to my second husband. I was married this time for around nine years before I left him and moved back to Scotland.
52. In Scotland I met and married [REDACTED] my daughter's father. He was always telling me how long he knew me from my previous life in Scotland, but I never recognised him as he was involved in an accident and he looked much older than I would have expected for someone around my age..
53. Around 1976/1977 I was admitted for depression to the hospital in Prestwich then Birchall, Rochdale after I lost a child. Part of the treatment involved receiving electric shock therapy. After being released from hospital my son [REDACTED] was born in 1979. Only then did I really start having a better relationship with my children.

54. I stopped being angry with everything and was determined to look after my children and make sure none of them ended up in care. Unfortunately through circumstances out with my control I could not stop my grandchildren going into care.
55. I get on well with my brothers [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My brother [REDACTED] died through drink, which I believe was brought on from his experiences in Smyllum.

Impact

56. The manner I slept in as a child led me to being almost paralysed when I slept. I would lie in bed aware of what was happening around me but unable to move. I am not able to breathe properly until I am stirred by someone. Only then do I become fully awake.
57. My mum used to put a glass bottle on the bed and told me to kick it off the bed and she would come to my room. The only problem was I could not move my feet. This all started when I was in the home and continued into my adult life. It was diagnosed by my family doctor soon after the birth of my first child.
58. My life in Smyllum affected how I related to people. I never discussed my life there with anyone because I did not want them to know what I went through. I was always looking for someone to look after me and protect me. It never bothered me at the places I worked because I never had to tell them anything about my previous life.

Records

59. I have never looked for my records relating to my time in Smyllum and I am unsure if this would help me.

Other information

60. 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.

ABT

Signed.....

Dated..... 6/12/17