

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of:

ABE

Support person present: No

1. My name is ABE My date of birth is the 1961. I am 56 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. When I was in care in Scotland I used the name ABE

Background

2. Mr parents' names were and I was brought up in the Ferguslie Park area of Paisley. I was one of thirteen children, the others being Two of my siblings died. I was the third youngest. There was quite an age gap between me and my older sisters. I didn't know my older siblings very well.

Life before care

3. The reason that I ended up in care was because my mother took ill with tuberculosis. She was either house bound or admitted to hospital. My father was unable to cope with us all so it was agreed through the social work department to send six of us into care.
4. I was aged six when we were sent to Nazareth House in Kilmarnock. I think that this decision was made through our family contact with the social work department. I

was only six years old when that decision was made so I do not have a lot of memories of how it all came about.

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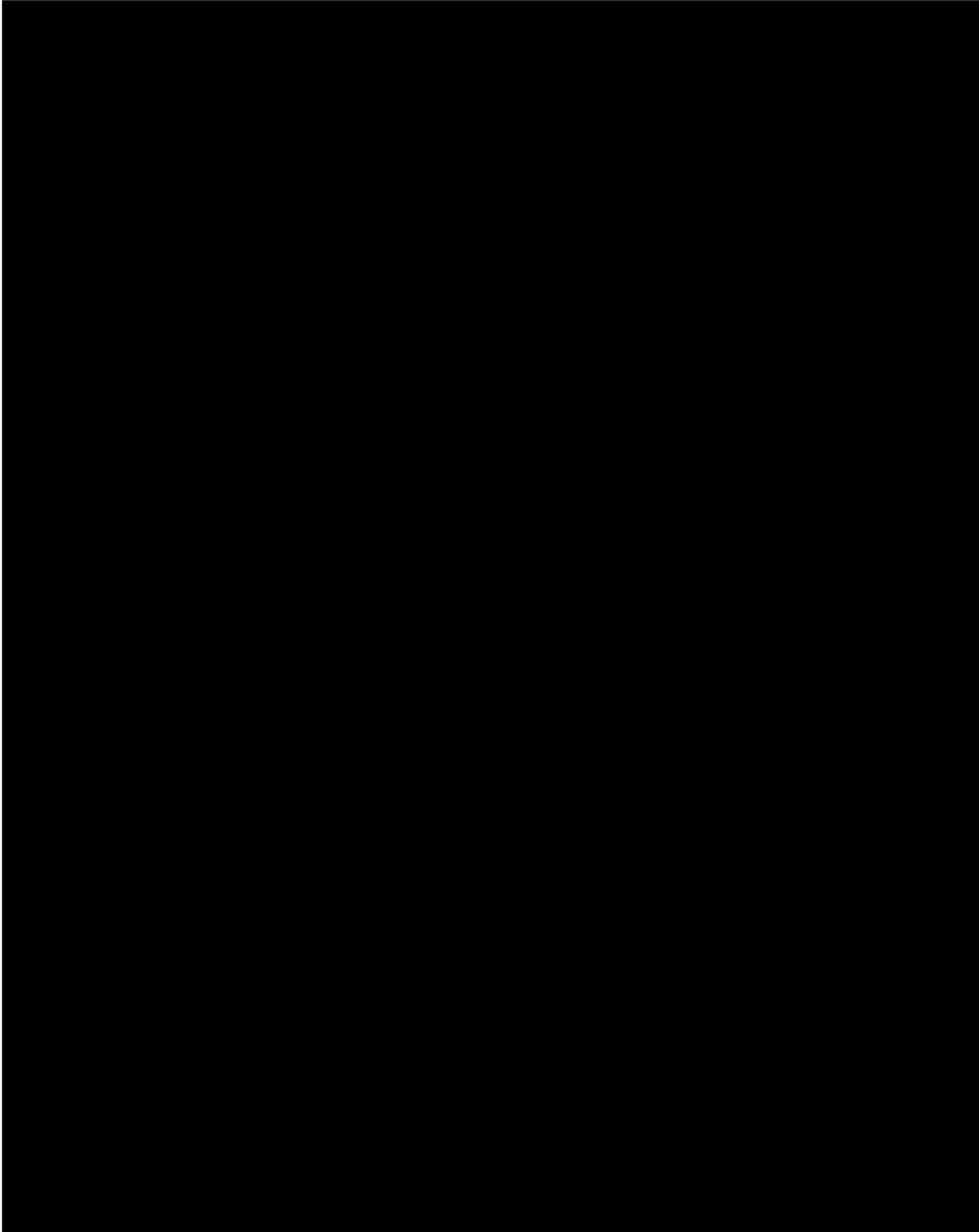
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Care at Smyllum Orphanage, Lanark 1969 – 1976

14. Smyllum was mixed sex although the dormitories were single sex. I started at Ogilvie House. When I was about eleven I changed houses and went into St Joseph's House at Smyllum. I was in the same house as my sister [REDACTED] but in a different dormitory. Ogilvie house stood on its own in the Smyllum grounds. There were about 25 boys and girls per house. When I arrived I didn't know anyone else who was resident.
15. I can remember that in the dormitory we had a small bedside cabinet for storing our stuff. I didn't have much stuff with me in those days. As I remember I shared a dormitory with my sister [REDACTED] and her sister [REDACTED]. I spent most of my time at Smyllum with them.

Staff

16. I remember Sister [EAC] and two other members of the care staff who were not Sisters. They were called [AFM] and [AFQ]. Sister [EAC] was the staff member I dealt with when I first arrived. I think I met [AFM] and [AFQ] later on.
17. Later on, I had to deal with Sister [IAG]. She worked in St Joseph's. I dealt with her until the end of my stay. Sister [IAG] thought that she was quite amusing in the way she dealt with the children in her care.
18. You only really had contact with the Sisters who ran the house you were in. You didn't really come across the other members of staff.
19. I remember the name of the teachers at Smyllum's school. We had a Miss [AEW] and a Mrs Sweeney. They were both very nice. There was also a teacher who we nicknamed [IAR]. She spent the whole time shouting and bawling at us. She used to belt us.

Routine*First day*

20. All I can remember was that, when we all arrived, we were met by Sister [EAC]. We were split up and sent to different houses. We were told to go to our dormitories to change and then come down for our dinner. There were no introductions to the other children.

Daily routine

21. You would be woken up at seven in the morning. We would wash and then go down for breakfast. After that you got ready to go to school. I think that you also had to do

the dishes. You had to have your school uniform on. You had to go back to your house to eat your lunch. After that you went back to school. After school you could play. I think there may have been some homework to do. You would then go for your dinner. After dinner you may have been allowed to watch some television before you had a bath and went to bed. You would be put to bed according to your age with the youngest going earlier.

Washing and bathing

22. I don't think that we had a bath every night. I know that you had to share the bathwater with the other residents. If you were last in the queue the water was cold and dirty.
23. I can't remember the nuns supervising us during the bathing and brushing of teeth before you went to bed. You just looked after yourself.

Leisure time

24. I remember the television room. You were allowed to watch television up to the time you went to bed. I did used to go to the Brownies. I found the walk back was so dark and scary. I didn't go back. Before I went to [REDACTED] for weekend foster care, I used to go the pictures with the others. We could spend our pocket money on sweets.

Food

25. The food wasn't great. You were made to eat it. It was tasteless. I still can't eat fried eggs as a result. When you refused to eat they would make you sit and look at it till you ate it. I remember sitting there for hours at a time. They would tell us that there were starving children in the world and we should be more grateful for what we were eating.

Religious instruction

26. You would have to say prayers every night and attend church on a Sunday. You had special clothes for a Sunday and for Easter and Christmas time. The religion was forced on you by the Sisters. You had to make Holy Communion. There were visiting priests. I remember serving them meals and taking their cigarettes to them. I had very little dealings with the priests.

School / education

27. The primary school was in the grounds of Smyllum. That is where I attended school. You had a school uniform which you had to wear. I used to see my siblings in the school but I didn't associate with them. It was not the done thing. I just think that the Sisters didn't like you associating with family.
28. When I graduated to secondary school I went to Our Lady's High School in Motherwell. It was a fair distance from Smyllum. I had to get the bus at seven forty in the morning to get there on time. It took about an hour to travel there.
29. I do recall that I did not tell anyone at High School that I went to Smyllum. One day one of the teachers announced it to the class. It was quite demeaning for that to be pointed out but it didn't seem to bother the other pupils. They were interested what it was like and asked me lots of questions.
30. I know that we did get homework but I never used to do it. I remember getting the belt for not doing homework. There was too much going on in the home. I just couldn't manage to do the homework.
31. There were exams at school. I think that I did the minimum required to get through school.

Sexual education and sanitary wear

32. There was one occasion when the Sisters took us into a room and explained to us about sex education and changes in your body. They didn't make it easy to get sanitary towels. On the first occasion I needed sanitary towels I was told that the Sister was having a tea break and I would need to wait. I was eventually given a personal supply.

Holidays

33. We did get to go on holiday to Girvan. We used to play on the beach. I have a vivid memory of playing on the beach and being badly sunburnt. It happened every year. The Sisters used to hide under brollies to avoid the sun. They would treat your blisters with calamine lotion which was very painful. We were never given any sun cream.

Birthdays and Christmas

34. When it was your birthday they just left a card on your bed. It wasn't very personal. I do remember getting a small present. I can recall getting a small teddy bear on one of my birthdays.
35. I spent all of my Christmases either at [REDACTED] who were kind of my foster parents, or my sister's. I think you got a couple of small presents to take away with you.

Visits / Inspections

36. I remember that my father visited me four times during my eight years there. My sisters visited me maybe on two occasions over the eight years that I was there.
37. I think that my social worker was called Mrs Fairlie. I didn't see her after she brought me to Smyllum. There were a lot of social workers that visited whilst I was at

Smyllum. The only one I can remember was the last one. He was called Mr Brannigan.

38. The Sisters were always present when you were visited by the social workers. You didn't dare say anything that could cause trouble.

Medical care

39. I think that we had medical help through a local doctor called Doctor Allan. I only saw him on a couple of occasions. I don't recall being seen by a dentist.

Bed-wetting

40. I can't remember having a problem with bed-wetting. However, I do remember the Sisters would tell the whole dormitory if someone had wet their bed or had an accident. I think some of the girls had a really hard time when they were wetting the beds.

Weekend foster leave from Smyllum and foster care at the [REDACTED] Carfin, Lanarkshire, 1971 to 1975.

41. I started going to the [REDACTED] family for weekends when I was about ten years old. [REDACTED] came with me. Before we started going, [REDACTED] and me were not consulted about the weekend arrangement. All I remember was that [REDACTED] came into our dormitory one day. One of the Sisters pointed to [REDACTED] and me and that was it. After that we went every weekend. The [REDACTED] would call at Smyllum on a Friday night and return us on a Sunday night. [REDACTED] and me shared a room.
42. It was not a good arrangement. [REDACTED] AHC [REDACTED] was 73 years old. His wife, [REDACTED] was much younger. She worked shifts as a nurse. She was always tired at the weekends so we didn't do much. [REDACTED] liked [REDACTED]. It was obvious that she was not so fond of me.

43. ██████████ used to slag off my own family. She would do things like ask me "Where were they now?" She would say that we were lucky to be with her and ██████████ AHC ██████████ As time went by we only went every other weekend. Later, it was only one of us every other weekend. ██████████ eventually told us that she couldn't manage any other visits because of her shifts.
44. On reflection I don't think that this was such a good thing to do. All my friends were back at Smyllum. I would have preferred to have stayed with my friends. They were bonding together and I wasn't getting the chance. The ██████████ were an odd couple to be doing foster care.
45. The foster care arrangement finally finished after an incident involving ██████████ AHC ██████████. I blame the incident on ██████████ She had told her husband that I liked him.

Abuse at Smyllum Orphanage 1969 – 1976

46. There was no formal discipline that I was aware of. The Sisters just used to slap you or hit you with whatever they had in their hands. It was a constant regime of hitting and slapping. You just did your best to avoid it. It was part of the routine. You could receive a slap or be hit with whatever the Sisters had in their hands at the time.
47. It was indiscriminate. It was very hard to escape the constant threat of violence. You were very glad that it was someone else and not you when they were being hit. All the Sisters were handy with their slaps. I didn't get too many slaps as I was a quiet girl.
48. On one occasion I was serving the priests their meals. Whilst doing that I also took them cigarettes. Some of the cigarettes were stolen. I got the blame despite the fact that I didn't smoke. I think it was my sister that stole the cigarettes. That didn't matter. I was slapped by one of the Sisters.

49. I remember on one occasion I was in the cloakroom. Sister IAG came up to me. She asked me what I was doing and I said nothing. She then slapped me across the face and told me to go and do something. I remember that because it was particularly painful.
50. There was one occasion that happened during a member of staff's birthday. A cake had been made. [REDACTED] and me agreed to take the cake to the member of staff. When it came to the time to take the cake it was nine o'clock at night. It was pitch dark. [REDACTED] and I were both frightened of the dark so we refused to go. Sister AGK then set about me with a slipper for about twenty minutes. I still refused to go. I couldn't see if I was injured as she hit me on my back. That was one of the most violent things that happened to me although I wasn't scarred or anything like that.
51. I was once told to get back into the bath as I was still smelling. It was said in front of the other girls. That was very demeaning.
52. I do remember an incident involving two of the other girls, ACB and [REDACTED]. I didn't see the incident but I was told about it by the girls when we were talking. They told me that a visiting trainee priest inappropriately touched one of them. They tried to report it to the Sisters but were told to forget it.
53. The teacher I knew as IAR was terrible for shouting and bawling at you. She used to hit you indiscriminately with the belt. The belt was a leather strap. There was no rhyme nor reason to the punishment she handed out. She was just a very angry woman.

Abuse during weekend foster care with the Park Family of Carfin 1971 – 1976.

54. On one occasion I was on weekend foster care with the [REDACTED] family in Carfin. I would have been fifteen years old at this time. I was on my own with AHC. His wife was away. My sister [REDACTED] was back at Smyllum. AHC touched me in my private areas and tried to kiss me. I managed to get away from him.

55. When [REDACTED] came back from church that day she saw me crying. I think she assumed it was because she hadn't taken me to church. She then took me back to Smyllum. I was very upset.
56. I couldn't tell the Sisters what had happened. My roommate [REDACTED] saw I was upset. She saw I was crying.. She told the Sisters that I was upset. The Sisters immediately dismissed me being upset as attention seeking. We were told to forget it.
57. I never went back to the [REDACTED] household after the incident. I think that [REDACTED] continued going to the [REDACTED] family. I felt bad about that but there didn't appear to be any other incidents. [REDACTED] continued to go there till she was sixteen. I can't remember any occasion when the Sisters asked me how my weekend at the [REDACTED] had gone.

Leaving Smyllum

58. I was at Smyllum until I was sixteen. It was decided that I would move in with my older sister. There was no preparation from the social worker. I was not able to cook or do the simple things like manage money. I had been in Smyllum for eight years and it was all I knew.
59. To be quite honest I would have preferred to have remained at Smyllum rather than go to my sister's house. All my friends were at Smyllum and I knew what the routine was there.
60. I can remember that, before I left Smyllum, my sister phoned the nuns and asked whether I wanted to stay with her. I felt quite pressured after that to stay with my sister. A decision was made that I would go to my sister's. I remember being very upset because I didn't want to go.

61. When the day came to leave I just packed a case, walked down the hill and went to my sister's house. [REDACTED] remained at Smyllum when I left. I knew that moving in with my older sister was not a good option as there was not much room there. There were already too many people living at her house. There was not enough room. My sister got money for me living there. My sister was only after the money.
62. After I left Smyllum I had no contact with social workers.

Life after care

63. I stayed with my older sister for about three years. I stayed with her until I met my husband. At the time I was doing various Youth Training Scheme courses and working at different jobs. I received no social work assistance.
64. After I met my future husband, [REDACTED] we managed to get a house together. I had no space at my sister's. It was a great relief to have my own house. [REDACTED] and I got married. I gave birth to two daughters. I now have four grandchildren with another one on the way.

Reporting abuse

65. I did try on two occasions to report what had happened to me to the Sisters. They told me I was attention seeking and to forget what had happened. There was no one else to tell. If you tried to tell someone they didn't believe you.
66. I have never discussed what happened to me with anyone. That includes my family. I have never reported what happened to the police. It wasn't until I saw all the press articles about [REDACTED] ^{ACB} that I realised I had a duty to support her and to tell my story.

Impact

67. I feel that I want to protect my family more than anything. I don't want them to be involved with the social work. I find it hard to trust people.
68. I started engaging with the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry in order to support **ACB**
ACB I never used to think much about my time in care. Now, as I remember things, I find myself crying and getting upset. I am starting to tell my family what happened to me in Smyllum. Being able to talk about it is very helpful.

Records


69. I obtained my records from the social work department. I have read through them. There is very little information in my records about my time at Nazareth House. There is limited information about my stay at Smyllum. There are concerns listed but there was little or no action taken. The records confirm that the **██████** family liked **██████** but were not so keen on me.

Other information

70. I am not a member of any of the survivor groups. I have been in touch with **ACB**
ACB after she appeared in the media. It was such a pleasure to catch up with her again after fifty years.
71. I think that there should be someone making more regular inspections of the actual establishments.
72. There should be one-to-one meetings with the social workers and not group meetings. I would always sit in the background at these group meetings as I was very shy. It was the others that did the talking and I was quite happy with that.

73. I hope that the Sisters realise that what they did to us had an effect on all the children that were in their care. I hope that the Sisters acknowledge publicly what they did to the children in their care.

74. 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  ABE

Dated 4 - 12 - 2017