

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

BCO

Support person present: No

1. My name is BCO. My date of birth is 1956. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. My parents, and were from the travelling fraternity. From social work records I found out my mother had tried to use a knitting needle to get rid of me. I was born premature at seven months. parents were from and apparently I stayed with them for a short while before she took me back under her care.
3. Later in life I discovered I had a brother who was about six years younger than me. had been abandoned by our parents in a field outside Elgin when he was about six weeks old. He was immediately fostered at with Miss and she was the house mother there. Like me, was extremely ill when he went into care. Miss found out from social work records that I was sister and she made attempts to trace me.
4. I do not have any memories of my life before going into care. When I was about nine months old Miss, who later went on to become my foster mother, saw my parents selling my clothes in the pub and I was nowhere in sight. She reported this to the police and after a search I was found in Advie Forest, just outside Granton on Spey.

5. When I was traced I was in my days old nappy. Initially I was taken to Miss [REDACTED] and she tried to feed me but I could not keep any food down and was sick all over the place. When I was placed in the bath she found my skin was almost dropping off. I was taken to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness and spent around nine months recovering.
6. Miss [REDACTED] wanted to take me into her foster care but the twins [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] my future foster brothers, had chicken pox. I was not allowed to be in contact with them because my immunity was so low and could not therefore move in.

Aberlour Orphanage

7. I was placed into care at Aberlour orphanage when I was about eighteen months old. I do not have many memories as I was very young. My first memory was sitting in the open air in a big pram and there was also a boy there. The nursery itself was called Princess Margaret Rose and was in a separate area from the main orphanage on the outside of the village.
8. I moved into the main orphanage from the nursery when I was five years old. It was a huge building and was run by the Church of England. There were six or seven large and very long buildings. At the end of the buildings was the school and then a farm. If you followed the road right round it took you back into the village itself. All the buildings are down now but there is a bell tower with the name of the Canon who started it in the 1800's.

Routine at Aberlour Orphanage

9. Princess Margaret Rose Nursery had hundreds of young children that passed through during my time. The only staff member I can recall was a Miss Heep and she was really nice. My time there was really good.

10. There were many buildings with five dormitories in each building. The dormitories had maybe eighteen or twenty iron beds. In the sets of dormitories, I was in the age ranged between five and eleven. The oldest children in the orphanage would have been about sixteen years old. The older girls were in different buildings. Likewise boys were kept in separate buildings from the girls. Each of the buildings had a dining room to cater for the residents within.

Mornings and bedtime

11. When I moved into the main dormitory I was just finishing my day at nursery school. After school, about tea time, I was told to go to my new dormitory. I did not even get to say goodbye to the other kids at the nursery. I was about five when I moved there and stayed until I was about seven. It was regimented there but if you behaved it was not all bad.
12. Miss BBG was [REDACTED] Aberlour. There was also Canon Leslie who was to do with the church as I am sure he did some of the preaching. Miss BBG said I was "thrawn", a difficult or stubborn child and she would call me a red headed bastard.
13. On arrival when I got to my bed it was covered in cow dung and I refused to go into the bed. The house mother, I can't remember her name got angry with me and beat me in the corridor with a long handled brush. She hit me so much and so hard she broke the brush. Only later did she check the bed and saw the cow dung. She came to me to apologise but that was a bit late. I was taken to another room for a while and when I returned my bed had been changed.
14. After the first night in the dormitory I was introduced to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They told me they were my cousins, but prior to this I never knew them. [REDACTED] was a couple of years older than me and [REDACTED] a year older than [REDACTED]. They took me down to the dining room for my first breakfast there.

15. In the mornings the staff would shout to waken you. You were expected to clean under your bed with a mop and bucket then get washed and dressed. The same mop was used by all and if you were at the end of the line you may be late for breakfast. Being late for breakfast often meant you were not fed.
16. We were sent to bed around six o'clock and after washing and cleaning our teeth we were all told to have the lights turned off. When it came to brushing my hair there was no help offered and everyone used the same brush. I was always having problems brushing my hair because of it being long, curly red hair and it usually got tangled.
17. We were not allowed any play time during the week. There were no toys to play with and no books to read. On Saturdays, we would move the furniture to make sure we cleaned underneath. The only people we interacted with were people from our own house. After the cleaning we would sit in the dining room for the rest of the day with no toys or books. On a Sunday I was allowed to go out of the grounds for a walk. I would make my way through and then round the village and back to Aberlour.
18. There was a lady, Miss Allan, who came on the bus each day to clean the house. She would normally be there Monday to Friday and between nine and three, she always had time to talk to you and she was really nice.

Mealtimes / Food

19. Breakfast was always what they called porridge. It was very thin and completely unappetising. The food in the nursery was much better. In the dining hall there were long tables with seating for around twenty including one staff member at each table. There were probably five or six tables in the dining room.
20. At the table you were not allowed to have any conversations with the other children. Anyone caught talking would be told off by the staff member and sometimes objects were thrown at you for talking. This happened to me on a couple of occasions and one of the items thrown was a salt cellar which bounced off my head.

21. If you did not eat the food it was put away and you were fed the same dish at the next meal. Most of the time you ate it at the next meal because you were so hungry. This happened to all of us regularly.
22. When I was about seven years old I was moved to the Dowans building and under the care of the house parents Mr and Mrs [BCJ/BCI]. They were in their forties, maybe early fifties. We were all a mixed age group of girls and I roomed with five other girls. There were maybe ten rooms in total in Dowan's building and the [BCJ/BCI] were [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
23. Each night in the rooms you had to say prayers. I can remember it being "Dear God, please make me a better child". The [BCJ/BCI] would stand by and wait to make sure we all said the prayer. On other occasions they would have us say The Lord's Prayer.
24. One of the meals Mr [BCI] made us was beetroot in a white sauce. It was disgusting. When I did not eat this at lunchtime, he left me there while the other children were allowed to leave. He came back an hour later and told me if I did not eat it I would be given it at tea time and if necessary at breakfast. Eventually I put it in my mouth and kept it there. I was able to keep it there until the end of meal time and went to the laundry room where I spat it into some of the washing. I did not know that it would cause any problems but the cloths turned pink. He knew it was me and beat me until I was bleeding. I have never eaten beetroot since.
25. Another of the food that he cooked and we later hated was mashed turnip. None of us liked that but he made us eat it.
26. For lunch we ate in our dining room. I remember we had mince, tatties and vegetables for our lunch and then back to school afterwards. Tea usually consisted of some soup, but not always. Although the food was not always bad it was rarely nourishing.

Washing / bathing

27. When it came to bath time we all used the three baths within each of the three bathrooms. Usually it was in order of age from youngest to the oldest. The bath water was not changed and this meant nearly one hundred children were using the nine available baths and the same water. Whichever house mother was on duty would be checking we all washed, but I never felt clean despite the bath.
28. When I moved to Dowans house some of the older girls would talk about Mr [BCI]. They would talk amongst themselves how he would come into the bathroom while they were in the bath and would try to touch their private parts. One time while I was having a bath he came in and tried to touch me. It was on a Sunday night and he said he was going to make sure I was washing myself properly. He tried to touch my bottom and I hit him. He retaliated by hitting me across the face. We could hear people coming up the stairs and that was when he left.

Clothing / uniform

29. For school I was issued with a kilt and a white blouse. Sometimes they fitted sometimes not. Whenever you had grown out of the current set you were given a second hand set by Aberlour. They were washed once a week. For my other day and night clothing I was given two sets to wear.

School

30. School was okay at Aberlour but there were times when I left the school. I went down to the river and over the bridge. I would sit and watch the wild life. Lots of times the staff were not aware I had left the building. I would try and be back for lunch as I was hungry. If any of the house parents found me missing I was beaten as a punishment.
31. Any time we were caught skipping school by Miss [BBG] she would take you to her room and she would use the leather strap on your hands, bare back and bottom until

you were black and blue. While she was handing out this punishment Canon Leslie would not take part but stood within the room and watched.

32. The teachers for the school came from the village. One of the teachers, I can't remember her name would take me to her mother's house for some orange juice and cake. I learned quite a lot at the school and when I moved to Speyside I found I was at a similar level to the other kids.

Trips / Holidays

33. When I was about eight years old, Dowans house had been donated a week's break at Butlins. When we got to the bus station the other kids were allowed to go to Butlins but I was told by the [BCJ/BCI] I was not getting to go. They called me "dirty red headed bugger". I was then put on a bus to Elgin and told to wait for someone who would come and collect me. I was then taken to a home in Hopeman to stay with people there. I stayed there for the two weeks while the others went to Butlins. I was the only one from Dowans not allowed to go.
34. The couple who looked after me behaved like parents would. When I was put to bed I was given a kiss goodnight and made to feel so welcome. If I wanted, I could go into town on my own and sometimes was able to go to the beach. I was in the top floor and you would look out at the lights at the radio tower at Burghead. You could go down to the shops and get the bread. You told them who it was for and they put it on the bill. Although I missed out at Butlins the people at Hopeman were really nice and treated me well. At that time I wished I could have stayed there forever.

Birthdays and Christmas

35. When I was at Aberlour I did not know when my birthday was. Neither mine nor the other children's birthdays were recognised or celebrated. It was the same at Christmas there wasn't even a tree decorated and definitely no presents handed out.

Healthcare

36. At Aberlour if we needed any medical help the local doctor from the village would come to the home. The only time I had to see the dentist there was when I was about five years old. I was told all my baby teeth were needing to come out as they were bad. I don't recall much about that as I was given gas to knock me out.

Bed Wetting

37. When I was five and moved to Aberlour main building I was having issues with bed wetting. This would happen once or twice a month. The house parents who covered the night shift would check your beds. They would turn everyone over and feel for any wet patches. If you were found to have wet the bed they stood you up and rub the wet sheets over your face. They then took you to the bathrooms where you were given a cold bath. You were issued with a fresh nightie and clean sheets from the cupboard and had to make your own bed.
38. Depending on the mood of Miss **BBG** the house mother, she would sometimes make us mop or brush and scrub the corridor. We were given a large bucket of water and some red coloured soap. If there were more than one of us who wet the bed then we had some help to do the floors. Miss **BBG** and whoever she was working with would check us regularly to make sure we were doing it right. You could not talk in case anyone came back.
39. When I went to Dowans house and wet the bed the difference was the night shift staff gave me a warm bath to clean myself. They also helped me by changing the bed. They did not routinely tell the **BCJ/BCI** but if Mr **BCI** found out he would beat you.
40. The worst time I had at the hands of Mr **BCI** was after wetting the bed. It was not the first time that week it had happened. He told me I would learn and I was not to be stubborn with him. He then locked me in the cupboard under the stairs for four days. I could hear everything going on in the house. He did not give me any meals while I

was locked in the cupboard. There was no toilet facilities and I had to go in my clothes. It was disgusting the way he treated me.

41. One of other residents, [REDACTED] who was about six years old, was aware I was locked in the cupboard. He offered to try and get me some food and said he would slip it under the door. He got caught talking to me by Mr [REDACTED] BCI and he was given a beating for helping me.
42. After the four days it was Mrs [REDACTED] BCJ who let me out of the cupboard. I was given a quick bath and then sent to school with no breakfast. At the school I did not tell anyone what had happened. I think the school had been told that I was off ill for the four days. I was so hungry I stole a pie from a shop on the way to school. I felt so ashamed that I had to resort to this. I never stolen anything before or since.

Abuse at Aberlour

43. For every time Mr [REDACTED] BCI caught us skipping school we were taken to his room which was next to the dining room. There he would use the belt and hit us on the bare skin. Whenever I or the other children were crying from the beatings the [REDACTED] BCJ/BCI always seem to enjoy that. For that reason I tried to hide how I was feeling during the beatings.
44. When I was about nine years old I shared a room with some older girls who were about eleven maybe as old as thirteen. There were a couple of babies in cots and they were a brother and sister. During the night Mr [REDACTED] BCI would come into the room and waken me. I was told to take the babies to the bathrooms and change their nappies. I was told to take my time and not come back too quickly. I was also told to make sure I took time to have a pee. This happened on many different nights. Each time I came back the three older girls were no longer in the room. I believed he was taking the girls to his room and he was sexually abusing them. I could see no other reason for him to be taking them away during the night. I was usually asleep when they came back.

45. It wasn't just girls he was abusing. [REDACTED] told me Mr [BCI] would take some of the older boys out of their beds during the night and take them to his office. [REDACTED] thought he was too young and that was why nothing had happened to him.

Leaving Aberlour

46. I later found out Mrs [BBP] a house parent at Aberlour, and Miss [REDACTED] were on the same training courses in Edinburgh and became good friends. I had a visit from Mrs [BBP] and she said she had seen my brother [REDACTED] and that he was the spitting image of me. At that time I was not aware of having a brother. I asked Mrs [BCJ] if this was true about me having a brother. She said "You have nobody in this world, why would anyone want you" and called me a "red headed bastard".
47. When I was about nine years old Mary Marquis, from the television, came to visit Aberlour with a camera crew. We were asked to sing "Nobody's Child" for them. This was to be used in a documentary about our home. Aberlour was closing and they were hoping to use this to find us homes and the song was used in that campaign. As a result of the programme being aired, Miss [REDACTED] saw me and contacted the social work.
48. The day I left Aberlour, in [REDACTED] 1966, I had been at school in the morning as usual and was called out of the classroom to see the doctor. It was strange as there was nothing wrong with me and I was given an examination. I came home to Dowans at lunchtime. I was told by Mrs [BCJ] I did not have to eat my neeps if didn't want to. In the afternoon she met me from school and took me to the hairdressers where my long hair was cut short. After tea I was sitting on the stairs with my clothes in a bag. I was not able to say goodbye to anyone including [REDACTED] who was such a friend.
49. Miss Grant arrived and said she was my social worker and took me away in her green Mini. She told me she was taking me to my brother. I was so excited. I was

taken to Speyside at The Square, Granton on Spey and re-introduced to Miss [REDACTED] who was still the house mother there. When I arrived at Speyside House [REDACTED] was at the door dressed in a cowboy outfit. He looked so much like me and he gave me the biggest hug of my life.

50. It did not take me long before I called Miss [REDACTED] mum. She introduced me to everybody in the house. I was shown to my room and the bed and mattress were so comfy. She took my bag that had all my clothes in it and threw them all in the bin. I was taken to the shops for a new set of clothes. She also bought me new shoes, wellington boots and slippers. The shoes Aberlour had me wearing were sized eleven but it turned out I needed an adult size one. She also bought me four sets of clothes for school. This was the first time I had ever been given new clothes.
51. The minister, Mr Johnstone, who was on the committee in charge of the house came to the home and was questioning the amount of money that was spent. Miss [REDACTED] showed him the state of the clothes I had arrived in and he then had no objection to the amounts.
52. There was a later dispute between Miss [REDACTED] and the committee. It was when I started my periods. We were all given pocket money but the girls had to use their money to buy our sanitary products. Miss [REDACTED] told them this was unfair and she eventually won the argument. It was arranged for the girls to get what products they chose from the chemist, when they needed it, and it was put on the bill.
53. There was another girl called [REDACTED] at the home and rather than us being known as [REDACTED] 'A' and 'B' mum asked if I would mind using [REDACTED] to stop any confusion. She said she had two knees and two arms and it meant she could cuddle two kids at the same time.
54. Whenever I did anything wrong there were no physical punishments, I was never smacked. She would sit you down and ask why you were doing those things and she would find a way to let you know how not to do it again. She never raised her hands to any of the kids.

Life after Aberlour

55. My brother [REDACTED] suffered from grand mal epilepsy seizures. As I was still wetting the bed Miss [REDACTED] thought I might have this as well and I was taken to Raigmore hospital in Inverness for tests. I was in hospital for about a week and found to be suffering from Petit Mal Epilepsy and was having seizures during the night. It was also found that when I was having the seizures they were causing me to wet the bed. I was given medication and the bed wetting stopped. At the house, before the diagnosis, if I wet the bed I was never punished. The sheets were just changed and I was cleaned up.
56. Miss [REDACTED] cooked great food and there was no issue if you were not liking it. All you were asked to do was try what was made and if you did not like it there was to be no trouble and she would try to find an alternative. Every week she would make a big pot of rice pudding and we all took turns each week to scrape the pot, that was the best part. During this time we also found out that I had suffered from a dairy allergy, again the same as [REDACTED]
57. While I was at Speyside I went to Granton Grammar to the primary school for about two years before I moved onto the high school. We were the first pupils in the new high school and it is now celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. I did quite well at school and wanted to work as a nurse.
58. After school and when the home work was finished we were allowed to play. In the early part of the evenings we were allowed to watch television. I was also allowed to read any books I wanted, I really liked Enid Blyton books. My chore when I stayed there was to feed the chickens and collect the eggs.
59. During the holidays Miss [REDACTED] arranged for us to spend about a month at Nairn school for a break. She was able to use the school for us all to stay in. We slept on mattresses on the floor. The local Rotary arranged for aunties and uncles to help look after us. In the mornings we would be allowed to go swimming and in the afternoon's we would be at the beach and have a picnic there. There was an

assistant, Jean, who helped out. Later when Jean left, [REDACTED] took over. [REDACTED] used to be fostered by Miss [REDACTED] and came back after taking up child care. They were both really nice.

60. When we were at Aberlour we were not encouraged to join any youth clubs or anything like this. When we stayed with Miss [REDACTED] she positively encouraged it. The committee was not happy with this but she told them it was the best thing for the kids. I liked the music and the dancing there.
61. For my birthday while there, at breakfast there were candles on a cake. James Usher was my rotary uncle and used to run the local bakery. I was given a tray of strawberry tarts as a birthday present and took them back to share with everybody. When we got back from the holiday it was always on [REDACTED] my birthday and there was a present waiting for me.
62. At Christmas we knew the presents were kept locked in a cupboard. We could see them through the glass part of the door. On Christmas Eve I was shown a pillow case on the back of one of the chairs in the kitchen and I was told about father Christmas. When I got up in the morning the pillow case was hanging on the end of my bed and was full. I could see the mince pies we left out the night before were gone. They even went to the trouble of making black boot prints on the floor and finger marks in the soap. All the presents we were given we got to keep. Somehow mum realised that I liked the models you could paint dresses on, from the Jackie magazine. One of my presents was some models from the magazine. There was also a selection box and we were allowed to eat sweets in the morning. We had turkey and trifle for dinner.
63. The one bad experience I had at Speyside was not with mum or anyone in the house. It was at the dentist. When I was around eleven or twelve I needed to get braces fitted and was told I needed to get some teeth out. I had a phobia with needles and needed an injection to numb my gums. I was struggling with the dentist, Mr [REDACTED] BGS and managed to get out of the chair. He dragged me back into the chair and sat on me. He got his nurse to bring in some rope, which he used to tie me to

the chair while he gave me the injection and pulled my teeth. He told me that if I tried to tell anyone they would never believe me as I was an orphanage child and I would lose Miss [REDACTED] I did not tell Miss [REDACTED] when I got back.

64. We did have visits at Speyside from social services. I remember the head of the services at Moray Council in Elgin was a man called Fred Edwards. He would visit with us and stay for dinner. I remember him being there one day when I came back from school with some home baking and he tried my scones.
65. There were other social work staff that visited. I can remember Miss Duncan took over from Miss Grant when she retired. They usually came about once a month. We could sit with them on our own and you could tell them anything. They would always ask if I was okay and check how I was doing at school.
66. Mum retired from [REDACTED] but took myself, my brother [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] with her and continued to foster us. We moved to a house in [REDACTED] just outside Elgin. When she retired I was the last girl with her and I had my own room. Although she was officially retired she still took some emergency kids. Mum always tried to make sure we could look after ourselves later in life and taught us how to cook and clean.
67. There were six girls and boys with me at Speyside and I still speak to most of them. I still speak to [REDACTED] and his wife in Tain but unfortunately his [REDACTED] died two years ago from a heart attack. The [REDACTED] kids, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] moved to Hull then York. Except for [REDACTED] they were all red headed like me. They were later re-united with their father. It turned out their parents were divorced and he lost contact with them. When their mother died he made enquiries to find them and mum helped them all get back together.
68. I left mum when I was about sixteen years old and went to Elgin College where I did my exams. I passed in English, Maths, Arithmetic, History, French and Anatomy, Physiology and Health. I joined the nurse cadets along with [REDACTED] I tried to get work at St James Hospital in Leeds, but when they found out I suffered from Epilepsy I

was turned down and I went back to stay with Miss [REDACTED] I was working at a hotel for a while and went back to college to learn cookery.

69. I went to a dance at RAF Kinloss and that was where I met my husband [REDACTED] I got married on my eighteenth birthday and moved into a house in Lossiemouth. I have just celebrated my forty fourth anniversary this year.
70. My first child, [REDACTED] was born a year later. He will be forty three now. I also have my son [REDACTED] forty years old and [REDACTED] who is thirty five. [REDACTED] stays in Missouri now. I have three granddaughters and three grandsons.
71. We later moved to [REDACTED] when I was pregnant, but this was a bad year for us. [REDACTED] and we also lost my brother [REDACTED] in a car accident. I did not like staying there because of the rules. You were not allowed to visit at other houses if they were of a lower rank. After about three months we decided to buy a house. We moved my mother in law down from a sheltered housing complex in Lochgelly, to stay with us for a year before she passed away.
72. I have been in the catering industry most of my life. I worked in a hotel for two to three years and worked in a pub for a few years. I found I had cancer and had a hysterectomy and was off for about six months. I then worked in a nursing home until I was about fifty six.

Impact

73. I did not tell mum about what happened to me at Aberlour. It was because she was an adult and at that time I still did not trust any adults. I thought if I told her she would not care for me anymore.
74. As a result of being locked in the cupboard at Aberlour I cannot stand being in dark rooms or closed spaces. I always have to keep a light on.

75. I always made sure that there was no way my kids were ever going to end up in care. I have a good relationship with my family but I do overcompensate sometimes just to make sure they got the things they need or wanted, especially at Christmas.
76. I never allow myself to go hungry. I always eat lots of food and sometimes I would make myself sick, like bulimia. This might have been the reason my teeth were rotten.
77. About three years ago I was diagnosed with Fybromyalgia. The first time I was having problems was about thirty five years ago but the doctors then told me that the pain was all in my mind. He told me just to go home and bake a cake. I never told any of the doctors what was happening when I was at Aberlour but when I was treated by Dr Buffy he told me it could have stemmed from a traumatic experience as a child. I am now prescribed Gabapentin and Fluoxetine to treat my pain and depression.

Records

78. I have tried to get my records that should be held by Moray Social Services. They told me that it was unlikely they would have any from that far back. It was staff from there that recommended I get in touch with the Inquiry to see if that would assist.

Hopes for the Inquiry

79. I would hope that the Inquiry can see that every child in Scotland is placed in care as if they were in a family environment. Speyside was a good example of the care a child should receive. The social work should visit and build up the trust, where the child will feel safe in disclosing any issues. Aberlour made me feel like I should not be on this earth. That is no way for any child to be brought up.

Other information

80. I saw my maternal mother when I was about eleven years old. She was lying drunk in the street, with her skirt around her waist and no underwear. She looked at me and I recognised her, but I just walked on. She did come to the funeral for my brother [REDACTED]
81. Miss [REDACTED] whose full name was [REDACTED] died in 1997 when she was about eighty one years old. During the latter part of her life she was awarded an MBE and an OBE for her services to child care and received her honours at Holyrood Palace. She looked after over four hundred children during her life.
82. 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.

BCO
[REDACTED]

Signed.....

Dated 22/6/18