

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MLI

Support person present: Yes [REDACTED] (Friend)

1. My name is [REDACTED] MLI. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1948. I am providing this statement on behalf of my son, [REDACTED] MLJ, who was born on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 1978 and died on [REDACTED] 2009. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. [REDACTED] MLJ was born in Bridgend, South Wales. He was the third child of four. My other children are [REDACTED], born in 1973, [REDACTED], born in 1976, and [REDACTED] born in 1979.
3. We were living in Porthcawl, Mid Glamorgan in South Wales in 1976 when my husband, [REDACTED], had his first nervous breakdown and was sectioned in [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. He believed that I was carrying the devil's child and that, therefore, I had to die. His moods changed from minute to minute. I tried to keep the family together, living a normal life, so that they didn't shy away from mental illness but actually embraced it. I used to take the children to visit my husband in hospital.
4. When [REDACTED] MLJ was a baby, [REDACTED] had another psychotic episode and threw an armchair across [REDACTED] MLJ's cot and out through the window. I believe this had an impact on [REDACTED] MLJ.
5. [REDACTED] MLJ didn't play well with boys. He wasn't physical or sporty and he tended to gravitate towards playing with girls. He was hyperactive from the start. A social worker informed me that the National Health Service did not recognise manic depression in

childhood. There seemed to be no recognition that people with mental health issues impact on others around them.

6. [REDACTED]'s last psychosis was in the 1980s and his psychiatric social worker advised me to be single minded and I asked him if he thought I should leave the family home and he just smiled at me. I decided to remove myself and the children from the traumatic environment. I left him in 1981 and moved back to Stirling to live with my parents. [REDACTED] MLJ was so sensitive and he wouldn't go to sleep and got into mischief. He was having problems at Allen's Primary School in Stirling. It was a very stressful situation. I went back to work and my parents gave the children the parental support and home life that I wasn't able to.
7. When [REDACTED] MLJ was about nine years old, he tried to buy a train ticket to follow me to work and the police had to bring him home. My father found [REDACTED] MLJ difficult to manage and he called social services because he believed him to be beyond parental control. [REDACTED] MLJ had been seen by child psychiatric services in Stirling, but it was a very good male social worker who recommended Doctor Field who was a child psychiatrist based in Mount Royal Hospital, Perth. He thought [REDACTED] MLJ would benefit from being placed in their children's unit in Liff which was just outside of Dundee.

Liff House School, Dundee

8. At this time, my other two sons gained assisted places at Morrison's Academy in [REDACTED] so I moved there. This meant that we fell under the umbrella of [REDACTED] Social Services and they fed into Social Services in Perth. There was a social worker from [REDACTED] involved called Molly Buchannan. Social Services were a bit of a rollercoaster. Some people were out to do the best for the child in their care, and others were more managerial and were more concerned with their outcomes than the wellbeing of the child. However, being in care meant that [REDACTED] MLJ could tap into the support systems required. I was advised it would be better if I agreed to put [REDACTED] MLJ into care voluntarily rather than have him taken from me. I agreed to this so that I could be involved in his care. I don't think Social Services liked this very much.

9.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

10.

11.

Fort Augustus Abbey School, Inverness-shire

12.

MLJ

was placed by Perth Social Services in Fort Augustus Abbey School in 1990. Social services used this school greatly, including in Glasgow, and placed

problem children there. I was told this by Jan Mitchell who became [MLJ]'s social worker. It was suggested by her that the placement at Fort Augustus was a last resort for [MLJ], and the only possible alternative was Balnacraig in Perth which I was not keen on. Social Services paid his fees and I had to provide the uniform and his pocket money. My husband had gone to a Benedictine school so he was happy for [MLJ] to go to Fort Augustus Abbey School. I thought [MLJ] would be ok there and that his dad would be ok about it.

13. The school was a Gothic Building. The school part was quite new compared to the Abbey where the dormitories were. It was an all-boys school and it took boys from age eleven up to age seventeen. I think they took non-Catholics too. The numbers had reduced so some dormitories were closed. Parents weren't encouraged to visit. There was quite an austere environment. There wasn't great communication from the school. I would go at mid-term to collect [MLJ] and at holidays. [MLJ] used to write to me and I wrote to him.
14. The school was run by Dom somebody who was the head of the Order there. It was a religious school run by Benedictine monks. It was a bit prison like. [MLJ] had to attend mass every day and twice on a Sunday. Father Stephen Geddes was the accountant and he was from Glasgow. He was my main point of contact at the school. I remember there was another Father from Malta. Mr [MMF] was the [redacted] teacher. The staff were mixed, both lay and monk. On face value the monks were very kind, but they were all powerful. They were left on their own to get on with it. The school was frequently visited by Jimmy Saville.

Routine at Fort Augustus Abbey School

First day

15. [MLJ] thought the school was quite nice although the bedrooms were very basic. He came with me to look at the school before he started. I think at the start he went into a twin-bedded room and sometime after that he moved into an ante-room next to

Father Stephen. I saw his first bedroom myself, and I think this was just before he was due to start at Fort Augustus as I went with Jan Mitchell to look at the school to see what it was like. After that, when I visited [MLJ] I felt I was actively discouraged from seeing where he slept.

16. On the first day it was either me or Jan Mitchell that took [MLJ] to Fort Augustus. In his bedroom there was a chest of drawers, a bed and some hooks on the door. I don't recall any other furniture. He wasn't allowed a lot of personal possessions. I don't know the name of the boy that [MLJ] shared with. It would have been someone from his own year.

Pocket Money

17. I sent a cheque to the school every term and this money was given out to [MLJ] by Father Stephen.

Mealtimes / Food

18. There was a matron who made food and ran the domestic side of the school. [MLJ] said the food was good and that there was lots of baking.

Washing / bathing

19. [MLJ] had to have a shower every day. It was the routine. The showers were communal so there was no privacy.

Clothing / uniform

20. The uniform was expensive. It was black trousers and a bright red blazer with a badge and a red, black and white twisted cord edge. He had to have sports clothing and running gear. They also had leisure clothes. Everything had to be name tagged.

School

21. [REDACTED] MLJ attended school in the Abbey. I think the classes were small.

Birthdays and Christmas

22. Birthdays were celebrated and the matron made a cake.

Visits

23. [REDACTED] MLJ's social worker, Jan Mitchell, from Perth Social Services, visited him a couple of times per term and reported back to me. She would come round to see me at home or would telephone me and give me a synopsis of what she would write in a formal report for her employers. I felt she was quite open with me and I trusted her. She told me [REDACTED] MLJ wasn't doing well in his second term at Fort Augustus. I believe this came from school reports at the time, but it's difficult to pinpoint anything in particular. I do not know if any attempts were made by the school to address these issues.

Healthcare

24. I remember that [REDACTED] MLJ once injured his knee on barbed wire and he couldn't do cross country running. The injury required stitches. I suspect he did this intentionally so that he didn't have to shower with the other boys. If he didn't do the sports at school then he didn't have to use the communal shower. He was seen at the time by a doctor in the school.

Running away

25. [REDACTED] MLJ told me in a whispered conversation on the school phone that his friend [REDACTED] had run away. I can't remember when this was. [REDACTED] was a boy in his year. This would have happened in the school year from 1990 to 1991 and I think it was in the second term. [REDACTED] had reported his abuse to the Inverness police, but the

police brought him back to the Abbey and police told him to stop saying nasty things about the monks. I think [REDACTED] ran to his parents' house and they contacted the police who came to their house. [REDACTED] MLJ was scared and worried that [REDACTED] had run away from what was scaring him at school but was brought back to it.

Bed Wetting

26. [REDACTED] MLJ wet the bed at home so I assume he wet the bed at school, but I have no idea how it was dealt with. This continued into his adult life when he wasn't well.

Abuse at Fort Augustus Abbey School

27. Initially [REDACTED] MLJ settled in and was doing very well academically. Then things went downhill and fell off the edge of a cliff. He phoned pleading to come home, but he wouldn't say why or what was wrong. I can't recall which term this was. After the Easter holidays in 1991 when it was time to go back to Fort Augustus Abbey he ran away into [REDACTED] and couldn't be found. Eventually his brothers found him and brought him back. He kicked and screamed and clawed in the car all the way back to school. I can't express in words the trauma that he and the rest of us in the car went through on that journey.
28. As soon as I pulled up at Crianlarich, he jumped out of the car and ran away. It was pitch black. The police were called, I don't know by whom, it wasn't me, and they searched for him and he was found by the police in a hotel begging and pleading not to be sent back. I don't know which hotel it was, I just remember it was a large hotel, set back from the road and there was a bus stop outside.
29. I took [REDACTED] MLJ back home with me and reported this to Perth Social Services. It was a report made on the telephone. The social worker Jan Mitchell came, and I assume to my home, but I am not sure. I think this conversation took place after the traumatic journey. When I commented on how [REDACTED] MLJ was hogging the bathroom and scrubbing his skin raw, she suggested his behaviour was indicative of somebody who

had been sexually abused. She had asked if he was doing anything out of the ordinary and my son [REDACTED] mentioned him hogging the bathroom during the holidays. [REDACTED] MLJ had scrubbed his skin until he drew blood. That's when things started to fall into place. She did a report for her employers to voice her concerns but I never saw her again. I never saw the report and I don't know what form it took. I don't know whether it was shared with the school.

30. It was decided to approach Harry the charge nurse from Liff and he persuaded [REDACTED] MLJ to go back to Fort Augustus for his last term, and then we would rethink things. He took him back to school himself. Arrangements were made so that [REDACTED] MLJ slept away from the rest of the dorm and Father Stephen ensured that [REDACTED] MLJ's bed was moved into an ante-room so that he could keep an eye on him going to bed every night. [REDACTED] MLJ must have continued to scrub himself raw because when I picked him up at the end of summer term his skin was taut and shiny.
31. [REDACTED] MLJ told me on the phone that his friend [REDACTED] had said, before the Easter holidays, that there were things going on at the school, but [REDACTED] MLJ wouldn't open up further. This was either just before or just after the Easter break, it was only [REDACTED] MLJ's behaviour in the holidays and Jan Mitchell 'lifting the lid' that made me see these things could be happening.
32. He told me that [REDACTED] and he had found a hiding hole under the main stage in the school and they would hide there so that the monks wouldn't find them and abuse them. I don't know when they found the hiding place. He told me this sometime after he had left the school when we lived in Warrington, so it between 2004 and 2005. When they were discovered, the monks chained them to the pipes and left them there for a long time. [REDACTED] MLJ said that the monks would bring in alcohol and give it to the older boys at the weekend and the boys would get drunk and would go on the rampage.
33. [REDACTED] MLJ told me sometime between 2004 and 2005 that he was raped in the school showers and then dragged out and put in a boat and pushed out onto Loch Ness in the middle of the night. I do not know when it happened or who was involved, but I

believe it was a repeated event. Another night he was taken outside and lowered into the swimming pool which was empty in winter. When giving confession [REDACTED] MLJ said that his head was pushed down on to the monk's penis and he had to give oral sex. He would also be repeatedly thrown naked into nettles in the school. I don't know when these events took place.

34. He told me this in one long conversation when we lived Warrington and he had an outburst on 19 August 2004. I know this because I have my own handwritten note of what he told me at the time, and that is the date written in my notes. He mentioned the name Father [REDACTED] MER in connection with his abuse and other school boys called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. There was also a [REDACTED] boy who was evil and had raped and beaten him. Additionally, there was a married teacher who had his own child and was a sex abuser.

Leaving Fort Augustus Abbey School

35. [REDACTED] MLJ left Fort Augustus at the end of his first year there. He returned home to live with me in [REDACTED] but there was an incident at home and he was taken to the police station at the request of [REDACTED] social services to be examined for sexual abuse. This was as a result of an assault in the house on his sister [REDACTED] and the things that had been said during it. The police doctor tried to examine him but he ran away again. Following the incident, he was not allowed to return home and he was placed in Balnacraig School, Perth. He then had a key worker called Jenny Thompson and she called me one day and asked me to come to Balnacraig because [REDACTED] MLJ had something very important to tell me. He had told her that he was raped when at Fort Augustus, so the staff there were aware of the sexual abuse. [REDACTED] MLJ told me that he had told Jenny.
36. At Balnacraig he told me that he had been raped by two men at Fort Augustus. It was just me and [REDACTED] MLJ in the visitor's sitting room who had the conversation. He said that one man had black hair and one had white hair. I have always wondered if this was Jimmy Saville and a very close cardinal or bishop friend of his. He said that this

had taken place in the public toilets and that they put toilet paper in his mouth so he wouldn't scream. I just cuddled him and told him that I loved him and that I would never stop loving him.

37. Jenny said that [MLJ] had been for counselling regarding the possibility of him having been infected with HIV which I thought was inappropriate. On one occasion [MLJ] came home and had a nosebleed. He went absolutely bananas because he thought he had HIV. He refused help from anyone in the family and we could only approach him if wearing rubber gloves. Balnacraig didn't focus on the abuse which was the failure. They just focused on the possibility of [MLJ] having HIV.

Life after being in care

38. [MLJ] settled in Balnacraig and he did okay. I tried to get him counselling to help with the rape but I couldn't get anybody. It was then decided that he should leave Balnacraig and go back into foster care in Perth. This was with a couple called [REDACTED]. He attended a local school in Perth. This placement didn't work out. [MLJ] returned to Balnacraig briefly around the time of his sixteenth birthday before his social worker, Molly Buchannan, arranged for him to have a flat in Falkirk and to attend Falkirk Technical College. Molly came from [REDACTED] Social Services.
39. When he was living in Falkirk, or just before, [MLJ] made a report of the abuse to the local police. He later received a letter that confirmed they were unable to take the matter further as it was out of time and outside of the statute of limitation. He was encouraged to do this by Molly Buchanan.
40. [MLJ] had a rocky time once he left the care system. He struggled with his sexuality and gravitated towards the gay community. He spent some time in Edinburgh working in a sandwich bar and then in a shop. He left Edinburgh following another incident then moved back to live with me. I was living in Warrington at that stage.

41. [MLJ] then heard that Fort Augustus Abbey School had closed a day after a report had been produced by social services in Glasgow which was allegedly very damning. The report raised the level of abuse and torture which had taken place at the school for many years. A friend of mine, [REDACTED], whose brother lived in Fort Augustus, said to me that he had witnessed the monks burning papers out in the grounds the day after the report came out. It was the talk of the village. I believe this was incriminating school records. I bumped into [REDACTED] and he asked after my family. I told him that [MLJ] was raped whilst he was at Fort Augustus and he told me what his brother had seen and heard in the village.
42. [MLJ] had an anal fistula and was referred to Bolton Royal Hospital. He was living in Bolton himself at the time. I am unsure how the referral took place, but assume it would have been through a GP. He was examined under general anaesthetic. The male doctor, whom I believe was a Registrar, I cannot recall his name, told me that he had been raped many times and that his insides were shredded. He was subsequently operated on at Bolton Royal Hospital to remove the fistula.

Impact

43. [MLJ] couldn't eat chicken after he left Fort Augustus and I think it was because the texture reminded him of an engorged penis. This is what I believe.
44. [MLJ] couldn't sleep at night because when he closed his eyes he saw himself lying on a slab, naked and covered in blood. He used to have nightmares about men in black cloaks. This is something he told me himself on a number of occasions. This initially came out in his outburst in August 2004. I believe now that he suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a consequence of the abuse. [MLJ] used both alcohol and drugs in an attempt to block out the flashbacks and the abuse.
45. On an evening in early August I returned to my home after work and it was fine initially. I went out for a meal with my friends and with [MLJ]. He was in a very agitated state that evening. His mood deteriorated rapidly and I left the house for my own safety and [MLJ] remained in the house. The following morning I returned and

discovered that all the furniture with reflective surfaces had been smashed. I believe [MLJ] had taken himself to a local hotel and checked in there and emailed his siblings from there. I called the police because of the state of the house, and they believed that a gang of people must have smashed up the property. [MLJ] was charged with criminal damage and I later withdrew the charges. On 3 August 2004, which may have been the same day, or the one after, [MLJ] emailed his siblings saying they might understand him if they knew what had happened in Fort Augustus.

46. [MLJ] had been sectioned on and off but his doctor had taken him off his list and so he couldn't engage with mental health services. His brothers arranged for him to be admitted to The Priory in Altrincham on a private basis. His doctor there, Dr Justin Haslam, said that [MLJ]'s mental health issues were way beyond what he and The Priory could offer. The NHS resources were needed, but were not forthcoming. There was a meeting arranged between The Priory, the police and the NHS but nothing further came out of it for [MLJ]. Dr Haslam said that [MLJ] was circumstantially gay. He wasn't able to be intimate with a male partner unless he was drunk or high on drugs.
47. [MLJ] said that he hated Fort Augustus and that he hated the Catholic Church. He repeated this to me all along, once the revelations came out. At the same time he said it wasn't the Church, but it was the people in it. I blamed myself and I still do although [MLJ] said he didn't blame me and that I shouldn't blame myself. [MLJ] talked of ending his life because he just couldn't fight any longer. He had tried and tried.
48. [MLJ] went to London to try to disappear. He engaged with mental health services in London and he had a psychiatric social worker. [MLJ] rang me on the Tuesday night but I couldn't get him on the Wednesday or Thursday. His body was discovered on [redacted] 2009 by his psychiatric nurse and a locksmith that I had asked to attend so that the nurse could gain access to [MLJ]'s flat. It was the locksmith who gained access to the flat and who rang me to let me know that the young man who lived in the flat had passed away.

49. [MLJ]'s death was a shock to me and very traumatic. I didn't speak to anyone in the weeks following [MLJ]'s death. I was made redundant. I didn't socialise because I couldn't commit. [MLJ]'s death destroyed me. He kept trying to get help but there was nobody to help him. [MLJ] was failed by the NHS and social services. The people who should have known what to tap in to didn't provide him or me with some direction. The NHS didn't want to know. He kept falling through the cracks and in the end he fell through the biggest one.
50. In my mind the monks took my son and you never get over it and that's hard. You expect to lose your parents, you expect to lose your partner but you never expect to lose your child. I blame myself for the terror and horror he lived through. It was 2013 before I could relate to anything or anybody and then I finally moved house to Suffolk.
51. [MLJ]'s abuse has impacted on his brothers in many ways. My eldest son wanted to get as far away as possible from [MLJ] so he went to University in Plymouth. He found [MLJ]'s life difficult to process. It also had a financial impact because his brothers paid for his care in The Priory. [MLJ] would have died a lot sooner otherwise. They also paid for the inquest and his funeral. Neither of them wants to marry or have children because of the risk of mental illness.
52. When my daughter got married in Italy in 2008, she refused to get married in a church because she didn't want to put [MLJ] through the trauma of a church scenario. By this time [MLJ] had become very fragile and we were not certain that he would be able to make it.

Lessons to be Learned

53. At the inquest into [MLJ]'s death, the Coroner agreed that the NHS had been going through the motions. [MLJ] had been treated as care in the community but a legal case subsequently decided that this should be the same level of care as is afforded to a patient being treated in hospital.

54. I hope the inquiry exposes the culprits of sexual abuse against children and that it highlights areas where action should be taken, so these things will not happen again. I would like to see the monks face time in prison and not hide. I hope the monks will be punished for their actions. The Church needs to face up to what has happened and not send monks to another country so they don't have to face what has happened. Safety nets should be put in place for the abused child and their families. People in authority need to keep an open mind and to accept that the child is telling the truth. They need education and training on how to listen and gently ask questions. Social services need to focus on the right things, like a child getting a sense of self-worth through achieving and not through material things.

Other information

55. I made a report to the police that [MLJ] was raped by Father [MER] and Deborah Doherty was the investigating officer. The Procurator Fiscal eventually told me in letters that there wasn't enough evidence for a case to answer. I have made those letters available to the Inquiry.

56. I initiated a civil claim for damages but was told it wasn't going anywhere and that the solicitors were going to close the file. Then out of the blue my solicitors were contacted by the solicitors who represented the Benedictine monks and I was sent a cheque for £10,000. I think this is blood money.

57. I am still in touch with [redacted], [MLJ]'s friend from Fort Augustus, but he is going through a period of depression at present.

58. 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.

[MLI]
Signed.....

Dated..... 15th April 2019