

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of [REDACTED] ABA [REDACTED]

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is [REDACTED] ABA [REDACTED] and my date of birth is [REDACTED] 1950. I am 67 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before care

2. I was born in [REDACTED] in Stirlingshire. I was the eldest of four children and have two sisters called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and a young brother who died [REDACTED]. I have two children [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I am no longer married. I am now retired having previously worked as a trainer coordinator with [REDACTED] which involved recruiting, organising childcare, organising a venue, lunches expenses etc. I also did confidence building with a group. This was a fifteen week course and you did it all over Glasgow.
3. As a child I stayed in [REDACTED] opposite the art galleries in [REDACTED] with my mum and dad and brother and sisters. Dad was a [REDACTED]. They were young when they got married and he behaved as if he wasn't married and left the family when I was six. Mum always had various cleaning and retail jobs. She went on to education and gained her degree at Glasgow University.
4. Prior to going into Bellevue we had what I would call a normal life. I went to Fortrose nursery and then to Overnewton primary school. Family life was ordinary and I remember we had a reasonable amount of freedom, especially in the local Kelvingrove park.

5. When I was eight years old my mother ended up hospitalised after a massive breakdown and my granny took care of my brother while me and my sisters were sent to Bellevue Children's Refuge in Rutherglen. I've been led to believe that my Aunt [REDACTED] and my gran organised it via contacts they had in the Catholic Church.
6. My only real memory of being with my Aunt [REDACTED] was visiting her when she worked in the undertakers. I recall asking to go to the toilet and it was at the end of this corridor that was filled with coffins.

### **Life at Bellevue House, Rutherglen**

7. I don't actually remember being taken into Bellevue nor do I recall being taken out eight months later. We went in on [REDACTED] 1958 and left on [REDACTED] that same year. I only found this out when I recovered my school records.
8. The home was run by the Little Sisters of the poor St Vincent De Paul, though they have since changed their name to the Daughters of Charity. I recall that they used to wear these big fly away hats. I don't recall the names of any of the nuns, but for me, as an eight year old child, they were very big and scary and looked like aliens. It was like being in the scariest episode of Doctor Who as an eight year old child with an eight year old child's mind.

### **Routine at Bellevue House**

#### *Mornings and bedtime*

9. I do not remember a routine. There obviously must have been one but I just don't recall it. I was immediately separated from my [REDACTED] sisters and I very rarely saw them throughout the eight months I was there. This was never explained to me.

10. Eight to ten children slept in dormitories in old hospital type beds. I recall the place always being cold. It was all girls in my dormitory. I have no recollection of any boys being in the home though there may have been.
11. I have no recollection of leisure time though the home had gardens that we may have played in. The problem is that my memory is implicit and I think there are parts of it that won't let me recall a lot about my time in the home. I didn't make any friends while in the home because I was more centred on looking after myself and my sisters, though I do recollect plotting with one of the other kids to run away.

### *Food*

12. The thing I remember about the food was that the nuns made this bread pudding which was disgusting and I simply couldn't eat it. If you couldn't eat it they would put salt on it. The nuns would force you to eat it and if you spat it out they made you pick it up and put it back in your mouth. I recall sitting for hours with the bread pudding in front of me because I couldn't eat it and wasn't allowed to leave the table.

### *School*

13. We went to School at St Columkille's in Rutherglen but I have no memory of this or of any education we received while in the home. The only reason I know I went to that school is because I recovered some of my records from the Mitchell library. I think we probably walked to school.

### *Clothing*

14. The home was always cold. I don't think we wore our own clothes but all I recall is that the wellington boots left big welts at the back of our legs.

### *Visits/excursions*

15. I recall being taken round the town in Rutherglen as a group by one of the nuns. They would take us into businesses, more or less begging and us basically being

touted so that the nuns could raise money. I think there were four or five kids there. I once recalled someone stopping us in the street and giving we poor orphans a box of Fry's creams, but we never got any of them. However, the more I have thought about that incident I realise that what actually happened was that the nun took us into a café and spoke to the person behind the counter and it was them that gave her the sweets. It was humiliating.

16. It was the same at Easter time when this giant Easter egg was donated to the refuge. There was a big broohaha about it being donated but we never saw any of it.

#### *Holidays*

17. I recall that during the school holidays we were taken to Langbank which was a similar place. It too was run by nuns, though they were different from the ones at Bellevue. I don't know if all the children went but I know that me and my sisters did. I remember that the way of life there was easier than at Bellevue. I don't know why and maybe it was just that it was different people.
18. There was an annual taxi drivers' outing, taking all the children to Troon but it only happened once during my time there and I wasn't allowed on the trip because I was considered to be rebellious. I was often excluded from participating in activities.
19. I also recall being taken to the grotto at Carfin and remember it being quite a bright place. Somebody there told us about how the priests used to hide out there and it seemed more like an adventure.

#### *Birthdays and Christmas*

20. I wasn't in the home at Christmas or on my birthday .

#### *Visits/Inspections*

21. I never got any letters when in Bellevue. I don't if it was the case that I wasn't allowed visitors or letters.
22. There was one visitor I recall. I was told I had a visitor and when I went into the parlour there was a man there and I threw myself at him though I don't recall what happened after that. I have no idea who the man was or why he was visiting me.
23. My sister recalls getting taken out in a car and the woman saying to whoever it was she was with "Oh, I could just adopt this wee girl and run away with her". My sister remembers thinking "But I've got a mummy". So I really don't know how often children could be taken out or by whom from that place.

#### *Medical care*

24. I recall getting a TB patch test during my time in Bellevue. The only other medical or dental care I remember was when I decided to run away. My plan was to have a reason to go see the doctor with something. I thought that I would be able to run away. I stuck a bit of plastic in my gum and they took me to the doctor to get it out. I didn't manage to run away.

#### *Religion*

25. Religion was a big thing with the nuns and we were always getting told we would go to hell. We were forced to go sleep with our arms crossed over our chest and got told if we didn't we would burn in hell. The nuns checked up on you when you were asleep. If you didn't have your arms crossed over your chest they would shout at you. I remember waking up one night and seeing this nun hovering over me with her hands up her sleeves. They would also tell us stories about how the saints used to suffer. They were really terrifying. I think we got told these stories most nights. I thought they were like horror films.
26. There was one particular story about Our Lady of Fatima who was said to have given a letter that was for the Pope to three children, but the letter was not to be opened. It

was said the letter spoke of how the world would end if everybody in Russia didn't convert. I found this very upsetting and was crying, but they just told me to get on with things and that my soul was in peril. I didn't even know what a soul was.

27. I didn't go to church when I was growing up at home so I had no understanding of religion or what it was about. I think I was punished simply because I didn't understand the Catholic religion. I had been christened in the Protestant Church so the Catholic religion was alien to me.

### **Abuse at Bellevue**

28. There was no interaction between the nuns and the children unless you were bad. They weren't interested in you as a human being. All they were interested in was saving your soul. That was their prime objective. I wasn't a Catholic. I was left-handed and deaf in one ear so I was already stigmatised when I entered the place. There was no understanding from them of me being there as a traumatised child. The atmosphere was sad. It was like being in a prison.
29. I wouldn't describe what the nuns did as care. They fed you and that was about it. The place was bleak. There was no emotion, no love or affection. There was only sarcasm and they put you down at every opportunity telling you that you were hopeless. They were always shouting orders at you rather than speaking to you. Your feelings were completely ignored. You weren't treated as an individual, but as a soul to be saved. I didn't understand their standoffishness, their cruelty.
30. If you answered back or asked questions you got threatened with the cane. For an eight year old, the threatened punishment was the cane and the threat of going to Hell. I don't think I ever actually got the cane and didn't see anybody else get hit but the very threat of it meant the nuns didn't really have to use it. I heard from other kids that they got the cane but I didn't see this.

31. Other kids also told me that if they found nits in your hair you would get a stroke of the cane for each nit they found. I didn't even know what nits were. Although I heard about this happening I didn't actually see it and it never happened to me.
32. I would get into trouble for asking questions like "Where is my mum? When is she coming for us? Where are my sisters?". I don't think I was unruly. By asking all these questions, however, I was being seen and heard instead of seen but not heard, which is all the nuns wanted.
33. The punishment for the younger ones, like my sisters, was the shoe brush on the back of the hand. Again, I didn't actually see anybody punished this way but the implied threat was enough to scare the kids into behaving.
34. I remember I was locked in a dark room several times. This was like a small, old, Scout hut that I seem to recall was in the grounds. I was locked in there simply because I didn't follow their rules. But I didn't know either their rules nor did I understand the language they used. I hadn't been brought up in a care home.
35. There were two occasions in particular that I can remember being locked in the dark room. One was on Bonfire Night and the other was the day that the rest of the kids went on the annual taxi outing. The fireworks were a treat but being locked in the dark room I was only able to see them out of the window. I don't recall what I had done to be put in the room.

#### *Bed-wetting*

36. There was really only one incident with bedwetting that I recall and it involved my sister [REDACTED] who was only five at the time. I think what happened was that my other sister [REDACTED] came into my dorm in a state and told me that the nuns were going to hit [REDACTED] for wetting the bed. I ran in and faced up to them and told them they weren't going to hit my wee sister. They didn't punish [REDACTED] but I got hauled up in front of the Mother Superior and a priest though my only recollection of that was the Mother Superior and the priest laughed at me.

37. Even though [REDACTED] was only five she had had the presence of mind to change her sheets in the middle of the night. I think one of the other kids must have told her where to get the fresh sheets.
38. I think kids who wet their beds had to wash their sheets were pointed out as bed-wetters and humiliated. The other kids told me about it. I've no recollection of seeing anybody actually punished for wetting their bed. I never had problems with bed-wetting myself. I would not see physical punishments as they would be carried out elsewhere but I did see children being humiliated for bed wetting.

### **Leaving Bellevue**

39. My mother phoned them up when she was recovered and said she had a place for us to stay. She said she was coming to get us which she did. There were no formal checks done to see if she was actually my mother. There was no social work involvement and my mum didn't even speak to the Mother Superior. My mum has told me all this.
40. I don't remember going home, or the journey. What I do recall is that first night we were all sitting on the bed with my mum singing "Happy Talk" to us. That was just wonderful.
41. My mum had managed to get a single end flat [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. After that we moved to [REDACTED] Road. That was just a room and kitchen and then we moved to Easterhouse.

### **Life after care**

42. I left school at fifteen though I didn't go much after I turned thirteen because I was always playing truant it. When I went to secondary school, St Gregory's, I was put into an E class which was for people who were not considered to be academic. My brother and sisters were put into high achiever classes. Basically they were



preparing me to do things like iron hankies, clean houses and learn how to make toasted cheese.

43. To me this confirmed everything that the nuns had said to me - that I was stupid and was never going to amount to anything. This had a big impact on my self-esteem.
44. I got my first job in [REDACTED] in Easterhouse when I was fifteen. I didn't really get on with work as I didn't understand it and I ended up with lots and lots of jobs. I've been a shop-assistant, a conductress, I've worked in factories, retail. Basically lots of jobs but never for very long in any of them.
45. When I was thirty I went to Langside College and studied English and modern studies, got myself educated and realised that I did have a brain in my head. I did this because my mother, who worked as a volunteer with Citizen's Advice Bureau, found out I could get a mature student allowance which, as a lone parent with two children, I couldn't have done it otherwise.
46. I managed to get O'grades in English and modern studies and I then went to night school and got my Higher English I then went to Jordanhill College where I got a diploma in youth and community studies.

### **Reporting of abuse**

47. I haven't reported the abuse at Bellevue because I did not know how to – and my self-esteem was so low I did not have the confidence and thought I would not be believed.

### **Impact**

48. The impact on me has been low self-esteem. My time in the home was dehumanising. It was hell on earth and it has affected me all my life. I suffer from depression and anxiety. There was no love or understanding and no nurturing. They just destroyed my self-esteem in the eight months I was in that place. There was a

fear every day that you would be caned or humiliated. That fear has never left me. That all came from the attitude of the people who should have been looking after me.

49. It caused me to under achieve at an early age. I should have been able to get educated at school rather than have to wait till I was thirty before I got a qualification. This was because I was in a low achieving class. I blame this on my time at Bellevue because they stole my confidence and made me fearful.
50. My aunty tells me that before I went in there I was an intelligent and clever child who was curious about things and asked questions. When I came out of Bellevue, however, I was very withdrawn and uncommunicative with anybody. This was because I couldn't express myself, something the nuns never let us do. They had really knocked out of me the ability to ask questions.
51. To this day I cannot sleep without the light and television on because I'm frightened to go to sleep. I put this down to the nuns forcing me to sleep with my arms across my chest so as to save my soul and stop me going to Hell if I died in my sleep. Logically I know that's a load of rubbish but it's just stuck with me all my life.
52. I found it difficult to stick up for myself and lacked the confidence to face any sort of conflict head on. Instead, I tend not to confront and am the one who apologises and backs down instead of having the confidence to stand up for myself. This was right through my life right up to just recently when I had conflict in my work.

### **Treatment/Support**

53. After I came out of Bellevue my first treatment was in the child guidance clinic in [REDACTED], though I don't know how long I attended there. Again, it was run by nuns. I don't know if I was there because of my behaviour, but I was always afraid the world was going to end like when The Bay of Pigs was in the news. I was terrified twenty four hours a day by that for months. I was always overthinking things. I never explained how I felt to anyone and so eventually became withdrawn.


54. When I first split up with my partner in the mid 1970s I was in a bad way. I lost a lot of weight and was getting very anxious. One day I was changing buses and couldn't move. I got a taxi to my mother's house. She phoned the doctor. I said I was suicidal. I was told "Don't be daft. Mothers don't get suicidal".
55. They recommended I go to a group therapy. I went to the [REDACTED] but as there was a bullying culture there I left. It was a day attendance system. I can't remember if I saw any other counsellors. I was prescribed antidepressants several times but they weren't for me as they made me ill.

### **Records**

56. I need to find my records to find out what happened to me in that refuge and how my mum was able to simply come and get us with no paperwork. Did anybody actually visit me? Was I tended to by a doctor for my ear condition? It's just basic things that I want to know.
57. I started looking for my records in the 1980s but it was sporadic. Once my granddaughter reached the age that I was when I entered Bellevue I started looking for the records more seriously. I had contacted the nuns' headquarters in Mill Hill in London in the 1980s. I called them again. At first said they had records back to 1948 then said that they only had them back to 1952.
58. I then got told that there had been a fire and that the records had been destroyed. I called the safeguarder at St Columbkille's chapel and I got told that there had been a flood which destroyed the records. I called the Diocese of Motherwell which covers the Rutherglen area. They were enthusiastic at first. Then they then turned round and said "Sorry, we can't help you". I phoned the social work and St Andrew's archives, basically everybody I could think of. I emailed and phoned trying to find out more about these records.

59. I phoned and spoke to Sister Joan Moriarty who was the safeguarder for Mill Hill. She said she would help me in any way she could. I was getting nowhere, however, and my aunt in London went to Mill Hill. She was shown, but not allowed to touch, a book that was opened at a certain page burnt round the edges. It showed minutes of a meeting in 1948 and all the names had been blanked out.. All that was in them was a story about how nice somebody had been to donate money and how nice Christmas had been.
60. I got back to Sister Moriarty and asked her a few questions. Things like “Who had funded us? Are any of the nuns still alive? Who took us in? Where are the medical records and was there a punishment book?” She said “I’ll certainly look out that for you, ABA”. She eventually sent me a letter that spelt both my name and address wrongly. To me that is disrespectful. She said she couldn’t help me and that she had done this and done that. It was all misinformation. She repeated that there had been a fire and a flood.
61. I went to the Mitchell Library and discovered there had indeed been a fire. The place had shut in 1961. The fire had been in St Columbkille’s chapel hall in 1974. I was told by Father Raymond Breslin, the safeguarder in Motherwell, that there was no way such records would have been stored in the chapel hall. In fact he asked “Why would they be in the chapel hall? And why would they be in there that length of time?”
62. I also found out that a priest who had been in that parish when I was in Bellevue was still alive. I got [REDACTED] from INCSS, who has been a great support to me, to write to Father Breslin to ask if I could meet with this priest, Father Hayes, to ask him about Bellevue. He said that he had nothing to do with the Sisters of Charity and that they were in an autonomous situation.
63. I thought the Catholic Church was one big organisation but it turns out that it’s more like a franchise. Not so, however, with the Sisters of Charity who are answerable to the Vincentian Priests and to the motherhouse in Paris and ultimately Rome. So they are not autonomous. I asked to meet with Father Hayes. I was told that there had

been about twelve novitiates there at the time and that Father Hayes wouldn't have had anything to do with them even though he served as a priest at St Columbkil's for over ten years.. He more or less said "No, you canny meet him". That was another barrier put up.

64. According to the transcript of evidence from phase one hearings of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry the nuns said that the priests came to say mass every day in that place but I only recall seeing a priest there on that one occasion when I was hauled up and they were laughing at me. Every time you ask questions about your time in care they put barriers up in your way. They are supposed to be cooperating and making life easier for people to help them resolve issues and feelings about having been in care. Looking for my records has been a long drawn out saga.
65. I tried phoning Mill Hill again and was told that Sister Moriarty was no longer there. I contacted their archivist, Bernadette Rider, who got a bit irritated with me and told me I should speak to the new safeguarder. I did but she said she had only been in the job six weeks and though she took all my details she never got back to me. That was six months ago.
66. The barriers that are put up are unbelievable to me. There is no record of Bellevue ever existing in the archives of the Catholic Church at St Andrew's House. The whole thing is a great mystery to me and the building is no longer there.
67. I wanted my records because of the way I feel about my life and how it could have panned out. As a teenager you don't really care. When you've got kids you're too busy. It was really when my granddaughter reached the age I was when I was put in Bellevue that it became more important to me to find out. That's why I've been dedicated to finding the records, to try and get answers for me.
68. I got interested in looking for my records in the 1980s. I was working in Easterhouse
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- 73. I hope the Inquiry shines a very bright light on that particular Order. They also ran the Magdalene Laundries. The Order had the cheek to apply to run a mother and baby hospital in Dublin this year. That was shot down in flames because a petition went round. They should be asked why they don't do child care anymore because it was a big part of their income. They used to have lots of places for kids that they received money for. I want them to stop telling lies and to start being upfront and honest with people and to stop putting barriers up.
  
- 74. I don't want a witch hunt because I believe it's the hierarchy in the organisation that is to blame. Those that looked after me had no experience of children and -just found me an inconvenience. I would like the two sisters who have already given evidence to apologise for the way we were treated and for them to say they regret how children were treated.
  
- 75. I don't want my mouth" stuffed with gold". I want the Church, a wealthy organisation, to pay fair and equitable reparations to people whose lives have been blighted by their experience of care.
  
- 76. 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 ABA .....

Dated 18/8/17 .....