

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

ABD

Support person present: Yes

1. My full name is [REDACTED] ABD [REDACTED] My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1938.
My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Introduction

2. My mother was [REDACTED] She was born on [REDACTED] and came from a large family in Motherwell. She was one of sixteen children and, at some stage in her early life, she was separated from most, if not all, of her siblings.
3. I'm not 100% sure but I think that happened because her father died when she was young, and her mother wouldn't have been able to cope with all the children. I know, from speaking to my mum, that she had three brothers, [REDACTED] who all died in the First World War. That might have been something to do with her mum not coping as well. I don't know for sure.
4. I think her mother was friends with a nun at Smyllum Park in Lanark, which may have led to my mum, [REDACTED] going to Smyllum to stay. I don't know when that was, or if she was alone or with brothers or sisters but I do believe, from family knowledge, that she may have been there with her brother [REDACTED] and her sister [REDACTED] I've always been under the impression that was the case.
5. My mum's brother, [REDACTED] lived to a normal age and I now know he was in Smyllum when she was there. Mother used to talk about him and she was always in touch

with him after. She also spoke of her sister, [REDACTED] who had 'sleeping sickness' and died of tuberculosis, as far as I know. I was always under the impression she had been at Smyllum with my mum, but I've never had that confirmed. If her sister was there I would like to know, as she would probably have died in Smyllum. My mum had an older sister, [REDACTED] who lived in Motherwell. I know she wasn't put in Smyllum and I don't know what happened to the others.

Smyllum Park Orphanage – [REDACTED]

6. As far as I know, mum left Smyllum in 1928, when she was fifteen. I don't know exactly when mum went into Smyllum, so I'm not sure how long she was there. She could read and write, so she was presumably taught at Smyllum.
7. One day, when I was in my late twenties, mum suddenly started to speak to me about the nuns and Smyllum. She would have been in her fifties. It was out of the blue and for no apparent reason, she just started to talk about it. She said that if she wet the bed, the nuns would put her in a cold bath and just leave her sitting there, summer or winter.
8. She told me they all went to bed much earlier than normal and she told me that on one occasion she got a piece of cake, from a Sister Christie, for doing something. Mum said it was very unusual to get such a reward. I remember thinking how strange it was that she should remember getting a single piece of cake for doing a particular deed that was fifty years ago.
9. Mum also told me the nuns were very strict. She told me that whatever the weather they were at church, and that it might have been every day. She talked about how cold it was walking to church, or out walking.
10. I'm cross with myself now as mum was speaking about it to me and I got upset, and angry with the nuns. I remember thinking some of them could still be alive and I just wanted to go and find them and ask them how they could do something like that,

leaving a small child in a cold bath, to my mother. I think she was going to tell me more but when she saw I was cross, she said no more. Then she told me not to tell anyone. That was when she told me some nuns were nice sometimes and she mentioned the bit of cake I told you about. She told me not to tell my sisters, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. She stressed that. She said not to tell anyone or to say anything and I didn't tell anybody.

11. I found what she was saying unbelievable as I thought Smyllum was a nice little convent school, like my sister [REDACTED] went to in [REDACTED]. A few years ago, when I ran my bed and breakfast in [REDACTED] I remember a man who stayed with us telling me that Smyllum was a terrible place. It was just in general conversation, but I was so shocked because I had always thought it was a nice place. I felt so guilty not doing anything and I think about that quite often.
12. I don't think mum spoke to anyone else after that day. It was as if she just suddenly decided she wanted to say something. It's strange, looking back there's so many questions I should have asked but I just didn't. However, once mum had made her mind up that she wasn't going to tell you, she wasn't going to tell you.

Life after being in care

13. Mum never went back to the family home in Motherwell. As far as I know the nuns found a place for her in London in a house with a priest and housekeeper. A presbytery I think they call it. I never understood why she didn't go back home, she was only fifteen, and her mother was in Motherwell. I don't know why her mother didn't take her back.
14. Mum did tell me that on the day she arrived the housekeeper gave her a small glass of sherry, mum probably didn't even know what it was, but she drank it. Then the priest came in and started hitting mum with a stick. Mum could only presume it was because she drank the sherry. I don't know where the house was or who the priest was that lived there.

15. She went from the presbytery to another lodging in London with a Jewish family. The young man of the house there made a pass at her, so she wrote to her brother, [REDACTED] and told him. Then [REDACTED] went and got her. I don't know where [REDACTED] took her at that time.
16. Mum did end up in lodgings in Stapleton, near Nottingham and worked on machines in a stocking factory there. She was friendly with their daughter and said the daughter was good and gave her clothes as mum didn't know how to get anything like that. She met my dad in Long Eaton when she was about 23 and they moved to [REDACTED] which was our family home. I lived in [REDACTED] for 75 years.
17. My father worked on the railway and we could travel by rail so I remember every summer, until I was fifteen, our family would go to Motherwell for six weeks and stay with our aunt [REDACTED] my mum's sister. We would always visit the church in Lanark where they used to go when they were at Smyllum. I don't remember walking round but I remember going to the cemetery. I don't actually remember the graves but I'm thinking now that it must have been in memory of my mum's sister, [REDACTED] My mum lived in [REDACTED] for the remainder of her life and died there in 1996.
18. I do know my mum visited her mum, when we all went to my sister [REDACTED] in Motherwell for summer holidays. I can't understand, so there seemed to be some bond there even after her time in care.

Impact – [REDACTED]

19. When visiting family my mum was always welcome to anything she wanted but she would hide biscuits or cake, all wrapped up, down the side of her armchair. She would hide biscuits in her bag and take them away home with her. Then she would hide them under a cushion at her house. She wasn't a greedy person, I think that was a knock-on from Smyllum where she didn't have food, therefore she was holding on to it, as it was so precious.

20. She also used to keep things hidden that were perhaps precious to her, like pens and her purse which she always had under her cushion. She would always be touching her chair and saying "Don't touch that chair" if we were near it.
21. She would wear many layers of clothes and she didn't seem to care very much about housework. Father did so much about the house, mum would try and she did a little bit, but she just didn't have any real idea about cooking. She'd had nobody to show her, that was the problem, and she just got overwhelmed a lot of the time. Father did a lot of it. Thank goodness she met Dad, he was good with her, he was patient.
22. Mum was happy and friendly and she was really broad-minded but would never condemn or speak ill of anyone for anything they did. She didn't seem to hug us, but we were happy. She perhaps didn't show us love, but we all knew she loved us. I remember my mum once saying "my three lovely daughters", so we were happy and loved, it was just different. That affected her for her whole life.
23. She didn't take us shopping to buy clothes or anything like that and she didn't bother with birthdays. Dad would take us to buy things and he always did the parties. Dad also did Christmas dinner and things like that. I remember she would always say we had too much at Christmas. We didn't have much money, but Dad would go mad and get us lots of bits and bobs. Mum would say, but not in a nasty way, that we didn't need to have so many. She never mentioned any toys that she had when she was young.
24. Mum would help tidy up but didn't know how to go about it. By that I mean she would perhaps spend as long as twenty minutes cleaning out and polishing a milk bottle. When she did certain things it would just take her longer.
25. Mum wouldn't have anything said against the Catholic faith and wouldn't say bad things about the nuns. She would just go quiet if we ever mentioned her childhood. As she got older, she was well looked after, and she would always have her prayer books or anything like that, close to her or hidden away, like I said.

26. Strangely, my mum maintained her faith and continued to go to church throughout her entire life. She was even in the Mothers Union. I could never really understand that.
27. Mum and dad never disciplined us at home. not in a bad way. She would say Dad was too soft with us all but we weren't difficult, in fact we always had a laugh when we were together. We were very lucky, we did have a very happy childhood.

Impact – [REDACTED]

28. My mum lost out from it the most but I feel we all lost out. I feel we lost the affection that some people have with their mums and that wasn't mum's fault. I just don't think she ever saw any affection herself and as a result she just didn't know how to give it to others. I don't remember ever seeing mum cry or show any emotion about anything. No matter what happened it was like she was always the same. It was like she was in a little world of her own all the time. It's quite hard to put your finger on it.
29. If we had known about mum's childhood, we could have changed things and made them better for her. Had she just spoken to us. Perhaps she didn't want us thinking bad of the Catholic faith as her and her Dad were staunch Catholics.
30. It's strange because part of me doesn't want anything to do with the church or anything but then other parts of me think that I should believe. You do want to pray but because of what's happened it's kind of stopping you, it affects your faith. I don't want to be like that but you just can't help it.
31. I felt I wasn't as affectionate towards my older child having not had a hug or a kiss at times. I don't ever remember having a kiss goodnight and I know that would impact on my parenting. I became more tactile and we are a very close family now, but earlier I just wasn't used to it and I didn't feel comfortable getting a hug or a kiss at times. So I know it had an impact with mum, and through to us as well.

Records

32. I have no records from Smyllum so I have no idea how long she was there. I am very keen to know the dates she was there and which family members she might have been with.
33. I have since found out that [REDACTED] and my mother were all in Smyllum but I still don't know the actual dates they were there. I also don't know if [REDACTED] died there and if she did, where she was buried. I would like to know all those details.

Other information

34. I saw a programme on television about Smyllum in September this year and it brought things back to me. It was really upsetting when I saw it only closed in 1981, which doesn't seem that long ago. That was what made me decide to approach the Inquiry.
35. When I was contacted by the Inquiry and asked if I wanted to go ahead, I spoke with a friend, [REDACTED], from the local church, as I felt a bit funny about doing it. She said to me that I must do it because any local priest or decent nun would tell you to do it as you have to bring it to light.
36. I've had to live with my mum's confessions to me and I do feel now that I've got to see it through. It would be good to know whether or not her sister, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was in Smyllum when mum was there. I'd like to know that she's been properly buried, if she did die there, and isn't in the mass children's grave I've read about in the papers.

Lessons to be learned

- 37. Nuns and priests are supposed to be kind and caring so it makes you wonder how this kind of thing can happen. How was it allowed to happen? I don't think they wanted to be there so perhaps that made them rebellious towards the people they were looking after. You hear about things that happen to children but when it's at the hands of nuns and priests it's a hundred times worse.

- 38. Someone should be checking the children and interviewing them confidentially to find out how things are going and to prevent influence from outside sources. So they could say something without the fear of having any more abuse. I just hope other people get the justice they're looking for from the Inquiry.

- 39. 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. ABD

Dated. 14-12-14