

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

KJV

Support person present: Yes.

1. My name is KJV My date of birth is 1958. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Background

2. My son RVC was born at Maidstone General Hospital on 1990.
3. After I graduated from university I moved to London and started working for one of the banks there. I started in financial sales before going into management and thereafter senior management.
4. Along with RVC's father and before RVC was born, I bought a house at West Malling in Kent. Within a few months of RVC being born, his father and I split up, so I was very much by myself with a young baby. I went back to work when RVC was about nine months old and I employed a nanny to look after him.
5. RVC's birth had been very difficult: it was a long delivery and forceps were used and in his early teens I found out through his doctor at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital Young Persons Unit that RVC had no feeling in his chin and limited feeling in his back and feet, which they attributed to nerve damage from a forceps birth, He never had talked to me about this. He had always looked a bit clumsy walking and running.

6. We stayed in West Malling for the next five years and [RVC] started school at St Mary's Platt, which is a Church of England school there. He was happy at school and he was doing well, but after a year, in July 1996, we moved to Horsham because of my work.
7. [RVC] started his second year at Holbrook Primary School in Horsham and I thought it would be a good idea to get an au pair to help out. [RVC] and the au pair got on really well and he became part of the family, remaining with us for 4 years until we moved to Edinburgh in 2000. [RVC] became an active member of the local football team as the goalkeeper and, although his enthusiasm knew no bounds, when he ran he was still a bit clumsy. However, he had a good group of friends and he was well liked. He was a happy boy.
8. In 2000, when [RVC] was nine years old and again because of my work, we moved to Edinburgh during the summer holidays. Before moving I had been looking at a number of different schools that [RVC] could go to as I didn't have a family support unit in Edinburgh and from time to time I had to be away with work.
9. One of the schools I looked at was Merchiston Castle, who told me that they did flexible boarding. They said that [RVC] could ordinarily be a day pupil, but that he could board for a couple of days as and when was required, if I had to go away on business.
10. I bought a house in the grounds of an [REDACTED] at Greenbank, not far from Merchiston so that it was much easier for [RVC]. The house was just walking distance away and my plan was that I could get [RVC] to school and I could pick him up and long-term he could just walk along the road.

#### **Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh**

11. [RVC] and I had two or three meetings at the school before he started. We were given a tour, we saw the facilities and we met some of the staff. I wanted to make sure [RVC] had seen everything and that he was happy to go.

12. I learned that the junior school, for the first three years, was called Pringle, the middle school was Chalmers West and Chalmers East and then there was a senior school. As well as the Headmaster and the Head of Pringle, there were also various Housemasters for the pastoral care side of things for each year group. I understood that if I need to contact the school I could do so either through the Headmaster, or the Head of Pringle or through the Housemaster. There was no formal arrangement for that however, and from my recollection none of the meetings we had were documented.
13. One of the Housemasters at Pringle, who lived in the house, was James Rainy-Brown, who was known as 'JRB'. and who also taught the boys rugby.
14. RVC had to sit an aptitude test, which he got on fine with, and he had to have an interview, which we both went along to. That interview was with Andrew Hunter, the Headmaster, and Peter Hall, the Head of Pringle.
15. Merchiston had a much broader curriculum than most schools, which was one of the things I really liked. RVC had a flair for languages and there were lots on offer, including Latin. It was, however, a much more formal system of education than RVC had experienced in England. I had to provide him with a number of things before he started, including his uniform. There was even a specific dress code for church on a Sunday, which included a kilt, a tweed jacket and a more formal jacket as he got older.
16. I had no previous knowledge of the wonderful opportunities that a private school education could offer, but these were explained to me at the interview and I was told that the school had the best of everything. The interview was basically a sales pitch and they told us they were happy to take him.

## Life at Merchiston Castle School

### *The First Year*

17. RVC started at Merchiston in August 2000 when he was nine years old. I have all of his school reports, which were sent to me at the end of every term. In each report RVC's various teachers make comments, as do his housemasters and various Heads, including Andrew Hunter, the Headmaster. I can provide copies to the Inquiry if they are required.
18. RVC seemed to be doing okay at first, although they were very long days and he was extremely tired. A typical school day started early with lessons and then some sport and then all the pupils, including the day pupils, would sit down and do prep. Generally I would be picking RVC up at eight o'clock at night after his work was finished.
19. There were also lessons on a Saturday morning, after which I would pick him up, but as he got older and became involved in rugby I wouldn't be doing so until teatime. RVC also became involved in the choir and so had to go to church in the chapel at school every other Sunday.
20. After a couple of terms of RVC's first year at Merchiston all of his teachers wrote in his reports at the end of each term that RVC was a bright lad and that he had potential, but Peter Hall, the Head of Pringle, wrote that RVC would benefit immensely from a half a term of weekly boarding. He said that RVC's organisational skills would improve and I went along with it.
21. On Peter Hall's advice, after the Easter of 2000 and for the rest of that term, RVC became a weekly boarder, coming home at weekends. He never said how he felt about that, although we did always argue on a Sunday night when it was time for him to go back to school. I thought that was a bit of that was separation anxiety though, because there was only me and RVC at home.

22. In some ways I believe that he enjoyed it. He enjoyed the sports and the activities and the friends that he had made. There were a lot of upsides. I asked him about boarding and told him he didn't have to, but he assured me it was what he wanted to do. Perhaps he was just telling me what he thought he was supposed to say.
23. RVC [REDACTED] slept in a dormitory with other boys, which I don't recall as being massive. I don't know a great deal about the daily routine, other than that he would have been woken by the prefects who lived in Pringle House and that the food seemed to be okay. I also know that he struggled to get out of bed and that they had very little downtime after prep in the evening before bedtime.
24. In fact, the boys didn't have a lot of free time at all. I suppose the thinking might have been that when there are that many boys together if they are kept busy they will be tired out. They did have regular trips to the seaside and camping and there were various activities organised for them too.
25. JRB also organised a camping trip every year that was like living in the wild. As I recall they went away for a good few days, possibly a week, every year. I can't remember where they went, but it was always the same place. There is a comment from JRB in one of RVC [REDACTED]'s reports that he 'needed to be toughened up'.
26. Even though he was a weekly boarder I still used to go to the school a couple of times a week and take him out for dinner. We'd either go home or we'd go to a restaurant. I don't think it was particularly welcomed by the school, but it was what I wanted to do. I would show up, but I always had to wait for him. Each time I would be told by whoever I saw that he had to finish whatever he was doing.
27. Every week I'd pick up RVC [REDACTED]'s clothes when I came to take him home and wash them. It was clear that he was having to look after his own personal care and it was obvious that he wasn't doing so properly. That sort of thing never mattered to RVC [REDACTED]. Unless prompted he was never going to change his shirt and as a result his clothes took a real bashing. His blazer was torn and he always had food on his cuffs, which will have been because of his clumsiness.

28. At the end of that first year Peter Hall wrote in his school report that, because of RVC's lack of maturity, the school considered he would benefit from 'consolidation of his first year'. He meant repeating it, which I wasn't very happy about, but they convinced me because they were the professional educators. I didn't know any better and I wanted the absolute best for my son. Looking back, I realise I was extremely naïve.
29. In 2002, RVC's second year at Merchiston and his consolidated first year, the school employed a Housemother for Pringle, which there had not previously been. She was a lady called Marion Anderson and we became quite friendly. After she had been there a while she took me aside and asked whether I had thought about getting RVC assessed as she thought he might have been on the spectrum.
30. She told me that she had noticed certain things about his behaviour and gave me an example of when RVC had been looking for something in his locker. Whatever it had been wasn't exactly where it should have been and she told me that she watched him, but he just couldn't see it. It should have been on the right, but it was on the left and even though it was in clear line of sight, he couldn't see it.

*Examination and diagnosis*

31. I asked the school if there was anything they could do, but was told no, so around the end of 2001 I got in touch with a lady called Dr Christine MacIntyre from the University of Edinburgh. I think I contacted her on a recommendation from Marion Anderson. Dr MacIntyre is an early years consultant specialising in the field of movement development and dyspraxia. I have a report written by her that she completed following her examination of RVC and I can provide a copy to the Inquiry if required.
32. I arranged and paid for Dr MacIntyre to go to Merchiston to see RVC there in February 2002. She met with RVC and conducted a series of tests with him. Activities for the tests were taken from the 'ABC Tests of Motor Impairment'.

33. The report confirmed that RVC was clearly on the spectrum and she diagnosed him as suffering dyspraxia. She details specifically his difficulties with fine motor control and coordination. When I used to watch RVC he did still look clumsy, although as he got older he grew into himself, as a lot of kids with dyspraxia do.
34. One of the things about dyspraxia is that it is often associated with traumatic birth and the report explains the condition and exactly how it manifests itself in children. It is also very specific about what the condition meant for RVC. It talks about how RVC finds it really difficult to hold a pen or fasten shoelaces. If something wasn't where it was supposed to be he just couldn't see it. Additionally, you might tell him one thing and he would forget it the next day, so you have to keep repeating it. Another typical symptom RVC suffered was dreadful organisational skills.
35. Separately for his teachers, Dr MacIntyre gave recommendations for RVC in the classroom. She said that 'RVC had recently been diagnosed with dyspraxia, which is often known as a hidden handicap. Pupils with this condition become quite adept at covering up their deficiencies and devise methods to circumvent their problems'. She also detailed the things the teachers needed to look for so that they could make allowances and help him. Again I can provide a copy of this document to the Inquiry if required.

*Life at Merchiston after diagnosis*

36. After his diagnosis I met with various teachers and Heads and I explained RVC's diagnosis to them. I also gave the school copies of both Dr MacIntyre's report and the document she gave me. If Merchiston had said at that time that they couldn't deal with RVC, I would have understood, but they didn't. I think a lot of the damage had been done by then though.
37. RVC did twenty minutes of exercises every day to help with his motor control and that did work. He ended up being a really good guitar player, he played rugby and he could really manage the ball. As he got bigger he seemed to grow into his body a little

bit, although he always had issues. Dyspraxia doesn't disappear, you just learn to live with it better.

38. Since his diagnosis I have five years of school reports from Merchiston, completed by his various teachers and all banging on about his lack of coordination, his poor organisational skills, that he can be disruptive in class and that he was fidgety. All things that the school said he needed to improve on and all critical of the very issues that Dr MacIntyre had identified as part of his condition and had advised them to be aware of. It was like telling a man with one leg sitting in a wheelchair to get up and walk.
39. Those reports are all about conformity, there is no recognition of RVC's individual needs. Time and again I spoke to various teachers to remind them of RVC's condition and to ask whether they had thought about different approaches. I wish I had been stronger.
40. I thought that if you were a teacher and an educator you should understand those things. You should work with it and find ways to deal with it, but the teachers and the school did not, they just criticised him and pushed him away.
41. Although RVC was already feeling bad with his condition, albeit it hadn't been diagnosed at that point, making him repeat his first year meant that all his friends in his peer group moved up to year two and RVC had to stay in year one. That coupled with the continual comments in his reports that RVC was not achieving what the teachers' were asking, caused his self-esteem and his confidence to go down every year.
42. RVC went through Pringle and into Chalmers West after third year, when he had been at the school for four years. He did a full academic year in Chalmers West and then moved into Chalmers East. The Housemaster in Chalmers West was OPA and in Chalmers East his Housemaster was Jason Cordingley, who I think had been a Housemaster in Pringle. His House tutor was Mark Appleson.



43. Towards the end of RVC's time in Pringle, some improvements were made to the bathrooms and showers. Previously there had been a big, old-fashioned communal shower and it was changed to individual cubicles. Marion Anderson told me that JRB had kicked off because he didn't think it was the right thing to do.
44. RVC got a glowing report from his Housemaster at Pringle before he moved up to Chalmers West, recognising that he had a good mind and 'despite the inconsistency, his ability is apparent'. It continued 'he should really give up with his efforts to convince us that he is not very bright and I hope he can make a good start to his GCSE course in September'.
45. His report for his first autumn term at Chalmers West, in 2004, is glowing. He clearly flourished when he left Pringle. OPA wrote comments such as there are 'definite grounds for optimism' and an 'upturn in his fortunes'. OPA knew RVC really well from the previous three years because he was also the . He says that RVC 'is an intelligent, talented lad, with a great deal to offer' and that he was 'more relaxed and communicative in his dealings with staff', however he adds 'organisation will be the target for the coming term, as will be personal tidiness', both being aspects of RVC's dyspraxia that he really struggled with.
46. Andrew Hunter, the Headmaster, wrote in that same report that he was 'delighted with the progress that RVC has made in all aspects of his life within the school'. He says RVC 'appears to be a transformed young man and would now appear to be reaping the benefits of a year of consolidation'.
47. In April 2005 RVC took part in a six week exchange to a school in Philadelphia. RVC and I had already hosted a boy from there in February of that year. I think RVC had to write an essay on why he wanted to go, but I think a lot was to do with which parents were prepared to host another boy and pay for their sons to go to America.
48. The school in Philadelphia wasn't boarding so at first RVC stayed with the family of the boy we had hosted. The mother was nine months pregnant, there was a birthing

pool in the kitchen, they were Quakers and so there was no TV, there was nothing. Merchiston should have made sure there was a good fit with the family [RVC] was to be staying with and I would again question their duty of care.

49. Another four or five boys from [RVC]'s year also went and all flew from Edinburgh to Frankfurt, where they transferred to Philadelphia. There was such a lack of organisation by the school, that the kid that ended up leading the others through the various airports was [RVC]. We'd had a lot of holidays and had actually had a trip round the world the previous year, so [RVC] was used to navigating his way around airports.
50. To give [RVC] his due, he had made friends with another boy in Philadelphia and engineered it so that he could stay with that family. [RVC] approached the school and told them that it was not working. I was contacted by the new host [REDACTED] and after discussion I agreed he could stay with the [REDACTED] family and in the end [RVC] loved it. When he came back he'd had his hair cut in a 'Mohican' and was wearing a big pair of baggy checked shorts and sneakers. He had a spring in his step and an American accent. He had found himself.
51. The difficulty with [RVC] going to Philadelphia was that he had been away for six weeks and when he came back he had to catch up on all the work he'd missed. That was a massive pressure for him.
52. At the end of [RVC]'s year in Chalmers West, in June 2005, [OPA] [REDACTED] wrote that 'after a strong start, it has been distressing to witness the change in [RVC], which began before his trip to America'. He continues that [RVC] 'lacked focus in the classroom', he was 'either being lethargic or disruptive' and 'little attempt has been made by [RVC] to fit in with routines'.
53. I read all of the teachers' comments in that report from the end of [RVC]'s year in Chalmers West and the contrast to the report from his first term is stark. [RVC] was on a downward spiral and was entering what was later diagnosed as a deep depressive episode.

54. Many of the comments from [RVC]’s teachers are nothing short of disparaging, stating that he wasn’t making any effort to catch up on what he missed from going to America. That sabbatical had been organised by the school and yet the school made no allowances for it. [RVC] struggled and I know that when [RVC] read those comments he just gave up.
  
55. Andrew Hunter writes ‘this is an extremely worrying report, I know many members of staff have spent a great deal of time with [RVC] over the course of the school year’. [RVC] was clearly on a downward spiral and yet he writes ‘if this continues, I will be forced to consider the age-old equation of the interest of the individual versus the interest of the whole community’. He adds ‘I am absolutely sure that [RVC] can do better than this’.
  
56. I think the school could have done better than that. There was no room in there for the individual. When I read that report, the level of the school’s duty of care is appalling. Surely somebody should have been asking what is happening with this lad? He had received such a glowing report and yet only six months later all the teachers were so critical.
  
57. Instead it was all down to [RVC]. He had to do the extra work to catch up, he had to be more organised and I wonder where his support network was. Not once was I contacted by the school and told that they were worried about him and not once was there any acceptance that the school had a responsibility to help him. They were more concerned that Merchiston might be shown in a bad light than in caring for [RVC] as an individual.
  
58. By way of discipline, I know that the school would give boys extra work, detention or chores. I also know that it wasn’t just the teachers and other staff who were able to discipline a child, the prefects could too. There is mention in [RVC]’s reports of him being disciplined and being the only child who had to do detention twice.

59. As part of the discipline, boys had to get 'effort points', which were awarded by the teachers. The danger with that sort of thing is that it is all very subjective and if a teacher liked a particular child they were going to give that child more points. There were also something called 'H' points, although I don't know what that was, perhaps it is related to the houses.
60. In [RVC] s reports there are comments that he needs to get more effort points and [RVC] just does exactly what he is told, responding that he will. He is just writing down what he has been told, because that is what he had learned to do.
61. I went along to parents' nights every term. Every parent would be invited for drinks and all the teachers would be around the room and we would go round and speak to each of them. I remember a conversation I had with his English teacher who suggested he would like [RVC] to start reading more 'adult-type' literature, because he was way ahead of others of his age. He thought [RVC] was really talented and really understood the subject.
62. That was what tended to happen at those parents' night, you got all the really good stuff. Every time though, I took them Dr MacIntyre's report and I reminded everybody I spoke to about [RVC] s condition.
63. I spoke to Peter Hall continually and he always responded that he absolutely understood and that the school was doing everything it could. He always assured me that he would pass my comments on to all of [RVC] s teachers. I suspected he possibly did want to do something about it, but the minute I left the room they just carried on as before.

#### **Leaving Merchiston Castle School**

64. [RVC] left Merchiston during his first term at Chalmers East, around [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] 2005, when he was fourteen, going on fifteen.

65. I was called in to see Andrew Hunter who told me that he thought [RVC] would be better off at a school outside Scotland. Peter Hall was also there, as was the [SNR] [SNR] who I think was [QZA]. I felt extremely intimidated. The meeting was held in a sort of sitting room in the school, however nobody took minutes and I never got a follow up letter.
66. I was told that I had to find an alternative school for [RVC] to go to and that in their professional opinion as educators he would be better off at a school outside Scotland. In one of the reports there is mention that if someone had to leave Merchiston no other school having read [RVC]'s report would want to take him, which I think is possibly why they suggested a school outside of Scotland. I feel that comment is nothing short of arrogant.
67. Merchiston put me in touch with Sedbergh School in Cumbria, who they used to play rugby against. It is in the middle of nowhere and outside Scotland and they thought it would be a good place for [RVC]. I took Merchiston's advice and the more I think about that now, the more angry I get with myself.
68. At no time prior to that meeting had Merchiston told me that they were struggling to cope with [RVC]'s condition. As far as the school were concerned there was nothing wrong with them, it was all [RVC]. I had given every teacher a copy of Dr MacIntyre's report and how his condition manifested itself in [RVC] so that they could work with him and yet every teacher wrote about his lack of coordination, his forgetting to bring things to class and his being disruptive. There was never an acceptance that the school needed to do something about it.

### **Life after Merchiston**

69. Before [RVC] started at Sedbergh we had to go for an interview and [RVC] had to sit a test, which the school said showed that academically he was fine. He started at the school as a full boarder around [REDACTED] 2005 and stayed there for the first term, coming home at Christmas. He went back the following term and stayed until [REDACTED] 2006 when he ran away and refused to go back.

70. I used to go down and visit him almost every week and when he came home at Christmas he was lethargic and just slept all the time. He was on a real downward spiral and just didn't care. He went back to Sedbergh after Christmas, but he'd had enough so without my knowledge he got a taxi from the school on his expense account (paid for by myself) , took it to the train station and was missing for two or three days before he was found at a youth hostel in Edinburgh.
71. I have a report from Sedbergh that says that [RVC] was positive about being there and that he was looking forward to the Lent term and the House rugby. It continues though that from the first day of the Lent term he was 'finding it really hard to settle for a variety of reasons, most of which appear to be completely unconnected with Sedbergh'. The report claims that 'he always had the potential academically and as a sportsman but he has not allowed himself to settle and for those talents to flourish'.
72. The Headmaster of Sedbergh wrote [RVC] remains a likeable rogue, who is intrinsically much better than that'. He says that [RVC] must 'simply stop running away from reality'.
73. He was really ill by the time he ran away and I knew he just couldn't go back to Sedbergh. He was still only fifteen though and he had to go somewhere so I went round to Firrhill High School, which was the local one to where we lived. I met the staff there and they were lovely. In hindsight, I wish I'd sent him there as soon as I had moved to Edinburgh.
74. [RVC] started at Firrhill after [redacted] 2006, but he was only there for a couple of months and didn't make it to the end of the year. As soon as he got to Firrhill his English teacher immediately realised [RVC] had problems. I can't remember that teacher's name. He told me that they weren't going to put him through his Standard grades because they had assessed him and established that he had the reading age of an eleven year old.

75. His Head of Year, again whose name I can't remember, said he was very concerned about RVC's ability to cope. That was the first time anyone had ever said that, previously everyone had just said they were concerned about RVC's bad behaviour.
76. At Firrhill, RVC was the posh boy from Merchiston. He was beaten up and his nose was broken and after that happened he never went back. One day I got a call from Firrhill to say that RVC hadn't shown up, so I went home and found him fully clothed under his duvet, ready for school, however I just couldn't get him to go.
77. After that he pretty much stayed in bed and getting him motivated to do anything was almost impossible. I took him to our G.P. and he was referred to the Young Persons' Unit at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital where he saw a psychiatrist who diagnosed him as suffering a deep depressive episode. He was given counselling and anti-depressants and we had family therapy as well.
78. The psychiatrist at the Young Persons' Unit had to really push to get RVC help because his mental health issues hadn't been properly recognised previously and it was like trying to push water up a hill. They said that what happened when someone is in a deep depressive episode is that their brain just shuts down.
79. RVC had to be taken kicking and screaming to these sessions, but he would spend time with a counsellor and for a few hours when he came out it was like I had my son back. Unfortunately it would all build back up again. At one point he came into my bedroom in the middle of the night crying and told me that he was really sorry but he'd just taken a load of tablets, so I had to get an ambulance to take him to hospital.
80. RVC was still fifteen at this point and he was just so unstable. When he got to sixteen he refused to continue with his treatment and continue taking his tablets. It was all I could do to hold onto him as much as I could. His behaviour became more and more erratic, he would disappear all day, go and see friends and I never knew where he was. He didn't talk to me and he became very withdrawn and that pattern continued for the next few years.

81. I don't know this for a fact, but my guess would be that when he stopped that treatment at the Young Persons' Unit, he started self-medicating because after that RVC became dependent on drugs.
82. In an effort to complete his education he enrolled at Basil Paterson College in Edinburgh when he was about seventeen and got his Highers. After that I rarely knew where he was or what he was doing. He didn't talk to me about his life or his friends. He always came home and I made sure he was fed, but he could never really hold down a job. I'd go to work and come home and find people I didn't know in my house and powders and pills lying all over the place.
83. It got to the point when he was nineteen that there were lots of arguments and it was a very difficult time to get through. Eventually RVC drifted away and never came back and that in itself was terrifying. I never knew where he stayed, he just sofa-surfed with different people. I provided him with a mobile phone and would buy him clothes and gave him food parcels whenever he showed up at my door.
84. In September 2013 I moved down to the Newcastle area because that's where my family are and by that time most of my work was based in London again. I had also decided that I wanted to retire.
85. I retired at the end of 2015 and by that time I was only seeing RVC every few months or so. He always came to Newcastle to see me for Christmas and I came back to Edinburgh every so often to see my friends and saw RVC as well. I kept in touch with him as much as I could, but I think he was getting even deeper into a very difficult lifestyle.
86. He came and stayed with me in 2016 and stayed for about a year and got a job with [REDACTED]. He held down that job for a good six months before he got another job with [REDACTED], who sent him to work in New Zealand, although he only lasted with [REDACTED] there for a couple of weeks. He remained in NZ for approximately ten months and when he returned to the UK he stayed with me for a month or so before returning to Edinburgh.



87. RVC came back home to me in January 2018 and told me he wanted to do something about his drug addiction. He always had an absolute fear of authority and had been arrested in Edinburgh for being involved in the distribution of drugs. He was terrified.
88. I found a rehabilitation centre at Sutton-in-Ashfield, near Mansfield, called 'Steps Together' where RVC spent three periods of twenty-eight days of rehabilitation. He undertook a rapid medically managed detox and after 2 weeks there he was drug free. Initially they had thought they might have been able to deal with his issues within twenty-eight days, but they decided to extend that for a month and then for another month. He received various therapies throughout his time there and he also attended AA and NA meetings.
89. He came back home in April 2018, but he was really struggling to cope. I think he had felt safe in the Rehab unit, but I think he was terrified again when he left and unfortunately he lapsed again. He became restless and distant and was very hard to get through to and at first he started abusing alcohol as a substitute. Unfortunately his life was so entrenched in drugs that whenever he was given an opportunity he was going to start taking them again and that is what he did.
90. RVC died in 2018 after accidentally overdosing on Heroin.

### **Treatment/support**

91. I don't know for certain, but I'm fairly sure the first time RVC had any treatment was when he went into rehab. While he was there and he was receiving therapy he worked through a lot of things that he'd kept bottled up for years and had never previously shared with anybody. He shared some of his experiences with his counsellors, with others in his peer group and with Darren, the manager of the centre. He was also encouraged to write in a journal every day and he also had to write down his life story and share that with his peer group.

92. I never saw his journal at that time, it was obviously personal to him, it is only since he passed away that I have seen what he had written. He had scribbled lots of his thoughts in it.
93. After RVC had been at the rehab centre for two weeks I went down to see him with my long-term friend and he was looking a lot better. He had looked really poorly when he first went in, but by then he had put on about a stone in weight and he looked amazing.
94. As RVC was an adult, the unit would not disclose to me what RVC had told them, but they did tell me that RVC was suffering PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Something had happened to RVC that was so traumatic it affected the rest of his life.

#### **Abuse at Merchiston Castle School**

95. RVC sat with me in the kitchen one day after he had come out of rehab and he told me he had been raped while he was at Merchiston. RVC's words were "JRB raped me, but I know you didn't know". I think in RVC's head he thought he had already told me, although before then he had not. He didn't give me any more details.
96. I don't have any evidence, but I do have his behaviour, I have what he told me, I have what the counsellors in the rehab centre told me about RVC suffering PTSD and I have his journal.
97. Reading his journal, RVC wasn't always consistent or organised because he couldn't be and a lot of it is disjointed. It is an outpouring and on a number of occasions he references some form of sexual abuse. I have provided the Inquiry with copies of the pages containing those references. The journal itself runs to about thirty pages and there are many further references to his emotions and feelings.
98. He is asked about what he considers are the roots of his problems and he has written down 'guilt', 'shame', 'embarrassment', 'fear', 'anger', 'lack of self-worth' and 'lack of

self-care. He also writes 'I blame the (person) that raped me as a kid', but then he seems to try and discount that because he says he knows somebody else who was raped who hasn't turned out like him.

99. When RVC wrote his life story in his journal, he wrote 'Father Rainy-Brown, school priest at school trip, raped me and two other boys'. JRB wasn't the school priest, so I don't know if he is talking about another person as well, but he did call James Rainy-Brown father. There was a priest at the school, who was a younger guy. RVC adds 'I didn't understand. It felt disgusting, dirty'. I suppose he must have been quite young when it happened if he's writing he didn't understand.

### **Investigations into abuse**

100. I told RVC that I would go to the police to report what he had told me, but he refused to allow me and said that 'he's dead, he got what he deserved'. I believe there had been a police enquiry following allegations that were made by other boys against JRB and he himself.

### **Records**

101. I have never applied to Merchiston for copies of any records they have of RVC's time there. I do have all the reports that were sent to me at the end of every term RVC was at Pringle and two from when he was in Chalmers West. I don't seem to have one for the end of the spring term.
102. When I look back at those reports, I see now that there are no letters recording any of the meetings I had with the school. The reports do record that there were meetings, but nothing is documented as to what was said and certainly no minutes were taken during them.

## **Impact**

103. RVC's time at Merchiston deprived him of his youth and the ability to grow up and enter society. He ran away from life. He had absolutely no self-esteem and he masked that and looked for comfort by numbing himself with drugs because life was so unbearable for him.
104. He had some amazing experiences that he managed to engineer for himself and he made some fabulous friends, although all were very alternative. All of those friends worried about RVC and tried to help him, but every time somebody got too close to him he would push them away. He did that with me all the time. He just didn't trust that anybody would actually really love him.
105. I have had a few very difficult years ever since RVC was about fourteen years old. When I found out that RVC was taking drugs I never slept and I became anxious and depressed myself. I was always waiting for a phone call, always anticipating something bad was going to happen.
106. I was stressed and anxious and so too were some of my closest friends. I saw a counsellor while I was still in Edinburgh and had a period when I was prescribed anti-depressants. After RVC died I started to see a counsellor again to cope with his loss and I am continuing with that now. I need it to try and address the guilt that I feel. I'm always questioning myself as to what I could have done differently, whether I am to blame for sending him to Merchiston.
107. I miss RVC terribly, but he was so unable to deal with day-to-day life that I think he's at peace now.

## **Lessons to be Learned/Hopes for the Inquiry**

108. Looking back now I realise that Merchiston was actually more about regimentation and running the school with precision than it was about the needs of an individual child. The individual child was lost, because every child had to conform and in my opinion

some serious errors of judgement were committed by the school. They let RVC down in every way possible and they let me down in every way possible.

109. I think schools such as Merchiston are fine for boys that are resourceful and can fend for themselves, but not for boys who might be a bit different, or a bit vulnerable, or boys that need extra help. Those sort of boys are too much for such schools who can't seem to be able to treat boys as individuals. It's much easier to have a group of boys all doing what they're told.
110. Discipline is only one part of school life and good pastoral care is essential. Being a good educator is not about facts and figures, the school has a responsibility and a duty of care to the individual, not to the reputation of the school. Not every child is a perfect square that can fit into a perfect square box.
111. There was no thought at Merchiston about mental health or about care, it was a school built on tradition. Everything was about upholding the past and making sure past conventions were followed. If anything threatened that tradition it had to be removed.
112. Schools such as Merchiston are closed shops and that cannot be allowed. There needs to be independent oversight, not just oversight by school governors who are probably ex-pupils themselves. I believe that the education authorities need to have a clear line of sight as to what is going on in independent schools in exactly the same way as a local authority school would be accountable. It should not just be about exam results and how many pupils they send to Oxbridge.
113. I think boarding schools such as Merchiston should refund the fees that were paid for children who were let down by them, abused while in their care, and where it's shown the school failed the individual child.. That is the only way these schools will feel the impact of the abuse. They must be held accountable.

**Other information**

- 114. When I found out about the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry I felt I needed to let RVC be heard and approaching the Inquiry has given me an opportunity to go through things and make sure that happens. I want to make sure that how he was treated is known about. That is really important. The people who were responsible need to be aware of the impact they had on people's lives.
  
- 115. Whilst RVC was difficult and had a very alternative life, he could connect with people. I only found out after he died that he had some fantastic friends and that he was really well loved. He was a very gentle, funny, loving, caring person and larger than life. Even though he was hard to deal with sometimes, you couldn't help but love him.
  
- 116. 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..... KJV .....  
Dated..... 26 November 2020 .....