

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of [CCL]

Support person present: No

1. My name is [CCL] though I've always been known as [CCL]. My date of birth is [CCL] 1954. I am 63 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I would like to say from the outset that the reason I contacted the Inquiry is to speak about two specific incidents, one of which I witnessed, the other which I was involved in. They were two quite different incidents, involving two different teachers. I have thought about them and asked myself, "what if others have come forward about them and can't find corroboration?". I thought that it would assist if I can at least corroborate what they say.
3. I would say that the two incidents I wish to talk about did, I suppose, affect me but I don't think anybody goes through school unscathed. We all have a hard time at school somewhere down the line. Not many manage to go through it scot-free. I don't think I was enormously damaged by these two incidents but I did find the two teachers who were involved to be alarming in a number of ways. I just thought that, for a matter of honesty if nothing else, that I should come forward to lend support should others decide to speak to the Inquiry about these things.
4. If what I have to say is of use to the Inquiry and helps others, then that's all well and good.

Background

5. I am married, have children and I am a writer and scriptwriter.

Life before going to Merchiston

6. It was my mum who wanted me to go to Merchiston. My dad left school when he was eleven and had no formal education. He was a lorry driver, a working class man who built up his own business. My mum was much younger than my dad. She was also working class but had a real sense of getting her family up the social class.
7. My father didn't give too much thought for that, but both of them thought they would be doing me a favour by sending me to Merchiston. I suppose that is one of the things that traps you as a wee boy, you are aware of your parents expectations and how much money it is costing them. You don't want to let them down.

Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh

8. I was in Merchiston for five years from 1967 – 1972.
9. I remember my dad drove me there. My mum didn't come because, for all that it was her idea, she would have ended up crying. My dad drove us up to this big gothic place. I was just barely twelve years old and wearing short trousers. I recall my dad didn't feel as if he could speak to the teachers because he had this feeling that they were better than him. I remember that he shook my hand and said, "see that you stick in".
10. I was aware of how much it was costing and I was determined to do the best I could and not to waste the money my parents had invested in me. When you go to such places you feel that you're there to sustain your position in society but you're never left in any doubt that you're supposed to feel privileged and lucky and supposed to be a pillar of society. That can be quite oppressive. You somehow felt that you had to carry the baton that your parents had passed to you.

11. Sometimes I felt that I would have been more able to stand against some of the experiences I had, if it was not for the fact that I felt obliged to fulfil my parents fantasy for me, not my own. This did become a trap.
12. Generally, there were many good teachers in Merchiston. A lot of the boys were farmer boys who would never be posh and maybe not the most academic kids you would ever meet. I don't want to give you the idea that the school was full of perverts and sadists because there were many decent teachers and many decent lads who just got on with it, with the idea that they would probably just inherit their dad's farm anyway. Although I did have some bad experiences there, there was a load of good things about it and a lot of good people there.

1st Incident involving James Rainy Brown

13. There was a new house called Pringle House next to the sanatorium which was for the youngest boys so that they felt safer. There were about twenty boys in that house all between 12 or 13 years of age. The housemaster was James Rainy Brown who was a physics teacher. I would say he was under 30 years of age. I believe he [REDACTED] himself a couple of years ago.
14. Everything was okay for the first few weeks but then one night we were having a game in the corridor near the dormitories. It was 2-a-side football and we were kicking about a ball, made up of rolled-up socks. I think there were three teams and if you lost, you took a break and watched from the side-lines. I think it was first to three or first to five. Something like that, but it was good fun.
15. My team had just been beaten and I was standing watching when James Rainy Brown came along and went crazy when he saw the boys playing football. It was about 9:30 pm and there may have been some sort of curfew that nobody had understood. He just blew a gasket. He frog-marched the 4 boys who were playing at the time to his room. I recall that three of the boys were [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Two others who were watching were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

16. When the four boys returned they weren't just crying, they were beyond crying. It really is difficult to describe the pain they were in. They were in complete shock. They were holding their hands in obvious pain and one was even on his knees. They were all crying, in floods of tears and couldn't speak. These were farmer boys and very hardy but they had been pushed to a position way beyond tears and I have never seen people in such abject pain, humiliation and shock. This is why I say it was such a sadistic thing that had been done to them.
17. To take four young boys and injure them to that extent was simply not right. One of them put his hands in boiling water just to try and reduce the pain. The thing is that you can't say it was a criminal act because, within the laws of the school, Rainy Brown was allowed to do that.
18. All four boys spoke of what had happened to them, later. They said that they each had to go into James Rainy Brown's room one at a time while the others waited outside. When they went in, they had scarves tied around their wrists (to protect the veins from blows of the tawse) and were given ten strokes of the tawse on each hand. He really walloped into them. These were hardy boys but each of them were screaming when getting hit. One can only imagine the horror going through the minds of those waiting for their punishment as they had to stand and listen to their classmates screams, knowing they also had it coming.
19. From my point of view, I immediately realised that the temperature of the school had changed there and then. I experienced a real jab of fear and a survival instinct kicked in. I just thought, "you really have to be careful with this guy".
20. There were two prefects, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who were about 17 or 18 years of age. They were just such decent guys and looked after us younger ones. They made sure James Rainy Brown didn't get another chance to punish us in that way. I know there were things that happened that they could have reported to Rainy Brown but didn't. Within the system, those two young men were brilliant.

21. This had a profound effect. As a wee boy, I just thought James Rainy Brown was scary. I was 62 when he ██████ himself and even at that age, I felt a sense of relief that he was gone. He was an ex- Merchistonian and came back as a teacher of physics. Although what he did was within the rules, it was beyond hurt.
22. Looking back, I think Rainy Brown was setting down a marker. It was his first housemaster job and he probably felt he could do as he liked and had maybe decided to go in hard and fast on his first occasion in handing out a punishment. The thing is, he didn't have to do that. There were other forms of punishment he could have handed out.
23. I have no proof that he was some sort of sadist but, as you get older, you can't help think that. Why else would a grown man do that to four such young boys. To me, it was complete brutality out of nowhere.
24. I doubt if Rainy Brown's superiors were necessarily aware of it. I know I wouldn't have said anything and I doubt if any of the others would have. I didn't tell my parents because you didn't do that sort of thing. There was also no point in telling the other boys, as they all knew about it.
25. As I say, these were all tough boys but they were in total shock because of what had happened to them. It was like something out of 'Tom Brown's School Days'.

2nd Incident involving Mervin Preston

26. When I was about 15 years old, I was in Rogerston East House. I had always been in the top class, though near the bottom of it. There was one teacher in particular who I have fond memories of. This was an English teacher called Mr Lamont who I really warmed to. He was working class, which was really unusual among the teaching staff, and from Aberdeen. He was very clever. This was also unusual, as a lot of the teachers were eccentric but not that bright. He started giving me very high marks for my work, which led to a rise in my confidence.

27. Mervin Preston was a big portly man and was the senior history teacher and was also the assistant Headmaster. He was nicknamed, "Potter" and "Merv the perv". He was also the house master of Chalmers West House, the house for first year students. When we would be getting changed after rugby, he would watch the very young boys in the showers, saying it was to see if we were old enough to need athletic support but we all knew he just enjoyed watching us. We all knew what was going on, but also knew we just had to put up with it.
28. As I say, I was 15 years old and in history class. I realised I was getting cleverer. I wrote a good essay on 1840's revolutions in Europe and Preston handed back the marked essays. He always handed the lowest marked essay back first. I was top and last to get my essay back. I just remember feeling so surprised and chuffed as it was extremely unusual for me to be top of this class.
29. Some weeks, maybe months, after this, Preston said he wanted to speak to me about my attitude to history. He said I was to come to his study. This was unusual. I wasn't worried but I found it odd.
30. I went into his study and he was behind the desk and said he thought I could be a scholar. He then told me to look out the window to see how the cricket was going. I went over to the window but there was no way I could have seen the game as it was being played about 200 yards away.
31. I heard his chair move, then he was behind me fondling my bum. This was done over my shorts. It went on for maybe 7 seconds. I then moved away and said something and got out as quick as I could, then ran. I just remember how glad I was that the door wasn't locked.
32. I didn't feel particularly damaged by this incident but it was clear he had been after something and had manipulated me into that position. What was odd was that he continued to be my history teacher and, later, he was involved with the giving of the prizes at the end of the year. Basically, it was a form of grooming because he had

used his position of power. He had the power to make you feel good about your work. This is just what I think when I look back, as I didn't know about grooming when I was that age.

33. I don't know if I was the only person he did that to, but if he did it to others I would hope that, by telling what happened to me, it can somehow help corroborate what they say. I don't recall feeling particularly angry about what had happened, I just thought he was a lonely old man.
34. Mervin Preston was an enormously powerful person in the school and was even acting Headmaster for a time. He was there for about forty years.
35. He also did this thing where, in front of the class, he would have somebody read out something and Preston would stroke their legs in front of the whole class. He was a dodgy man.
36. I told some of the other boys about what happened but I wouldn't have told the other teachers. You just tolerated these things. I'm sure others had much worse times than me and, in terms of the culture, I probably wouldn't have told anybody even if he had gone further when I was in his room.
37. You learn to cover up such things at a very early age in these schools and I think that that goes on throughout society as a result of it. These schools say they produce strong young men, leaders of society, but this isn't true. What they produce are young men who have learned to give the appearance of being strong, but underneath are actually quite damaged young boys who don't even realise why their mums sent them to such places. You just look at society and realise that so many people in positions of authority simply aren't believable.
38. Human beings tend to be one-part angel and one-part devil and you never know what part is going to rise to the surface. This is the same whether you are at a boarding school, an orphanage or whatever.

39. Overall, apart from these two incidents, Merchiston was a pretty decent place. A lot of the teachers were decent and kindly, as were many of the boys.

Impact

40. It's hard to evaluate what sort of impact being at Merchiston had on me, other than I am very suspicious of institutions and of a power hierarchy. I can never be impressed by that. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as it makes you look more closely at those in authority and question what they say and do.
41. This sometimes means it can be quite hard to get involved, as you can be standing on the outside watching things. I think that's one of the reasons I ended up as a writer which can be quite an isolated job.
42. I couldn't see a way of fitting in after all that. I knew I had been coached to go out and be a leader of society, yet I didn't believe in that system. I didn't know where to go and I didn't know what kind of class I belonged to and didn't really buy into the whole class system. It was actually quite useful in my life as a writer.
43. I tend to be a lonely person, not in a sad way but deliberately and I don't mind time on my own. I have never been one for joining clubs. I can be a team member if I have to but only when I get to know them. I wouldn't do it just because I was being told to.
44. I've always been independent and have my own way, go my own way and maybe it was the school that gave me those things.
45. I spoke to a friend recently and he knew what was going on at the school though his attitude is that of, "Things happen. We should just move on with our lives". However, my attitude is that I wouldn't want such things happening to my children which is why

I feel it is important to come forward and tell the Inquiry of my experiences. It cannot be right that, even in those days, such things could have been accepted as normal.

- 46. I think, though it's just my opinion, the law of averages say that such institutions will produce such people that get a kick out of having the power over people, especially young people. If such institutions are to continue to exist, then people have to be aware of this and take steps to prevent such people working there. This is particularly important as it seems to be the case that many of those people who have things done to them, go on to do it to others and the situation can almost perpetuate itself.
- 47. 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..... CCL [Redacted Signature]

Dated..... 26th October 2017