

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

FWQ

Support person present: No

1. My name is FWQ. My date of birth is 1968. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. I am providing a statement regarding my son MYW who was born on 1995.

Life before going to Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh

2. I moved to America with my husband in 1992 and we came to Scotland on holiday when I was pregnant with MYW in 1994. I got ill and we couldn't go back so we ended up staying and our son, MYW was born. We weren't sure if we were going to stay in Scotland permanently. When MYW was two years old I separated from his father. Things were difficult but I had my mother as support and MYW was very happy.

Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh

3. I had always wanted MYW to go to Merchiston Castle which is a private independent school. I looked round every school in Edinburgh and I thought that Merchiston Castle was the best and would give him the best education.
4. Merchiston Castle school was absolutely beautiful. It was in Colinton which was the south west of Edinburgh. It was a lovely building, gorgeous school, very posh and had huge grounds. It was absolutely stunning and had everything that you could

want from a private school including a swimming pool and sports pitches. It was the equivalent to Gordonstoun and Fettes. It was the best of the best, supposedly.

5. There were about four hundred boys at the school in total. It was mainly a boarding school. It took boys from age eight to eighteen and two thirds of the boys were boarders. Merchiston Castle didn't take children from age five so they recommended that MYW attend Clifton Hall in Newbridge. They said it was a good prep school so MYW went there from primary one to primary three, from 2000 to 2003.
6. MYW started Merchiston Castle School in September 2003 and went into primary four. Andrew Hunter was the headmaster. At that time Merchiston Castle took children from age eight although I think they take boys from age seven now. MYW had an interview prior to starting and Clifton Hall School gave him a report so that Merchiston Castle could see he was doing alright.
7. The school fees at Merchiston were extortionate, probably around twenty five thousand pounds a year. My mother had her own business and she paid the fees. MYW's father didn't contribute.
8. MYW was a day pupil in primary four and five. Not many of the boys in primary four and five boarded. When MYW was in primary four he had a female teacher and when he was in primary five he had a different female teacher. Everything was fine then. Quite a lot of the boys boarded in primary six at Pringle House. Pringle was the boarding house for the juniors and it took boys from age eight to twelve. There were about eighty boys in Pringle. About two thirds of these were boarders. There were different boarding houses in Merchiston Castle for different age groups. The teacher in charge of Pringle House was called Peter Brown and he was a nice chap.
9. When MYW moved into primary six he left the junior section of the school and he started having lessons with different teachers. I think he still had a class teacher but the boys went to different classrooms for other things such as gym and for science. The school was breaking the boys into the senior school pattern although some of

their work was still in the main classroom. MYW didn't like this because he had to carry his heavy books from classroom to classroom and this hurt his back. He just complained about everything and wasn't keen to attend school.

10. When MYW went into primary six there was a Saturday morning class and that is when he started staying in school on a Friday night. He didn't finish until 6pm on a Friday and he had to be in school for 9am on a Saturday morning. I felt that MYW staying one night a week at this stage would help him get used to being away from home.
11. On a Friday the boys had their evening meal then they had games. After that they had supper, a movie night and then they went to bed. On a Saturday morning they got up, had their breakfast and then went to school for sports.
12. By that time, in 2005, I had met my current husband so it worked out quite well. MYW had friends who were boarders too by then. I would pick him up at lunchtime on Saturday. That meant that I could go out on a Friday night which was my date night. I had a traumatic break up from MYW's dad and I was so glad to have met somebody.
13. I didn't even go and check out Pringle House. I just trusted the school. I have a lot of guilt about letting MYW board on the Friday night as looking back it wasn't what was best for him. After a few weeks he started to say he didn't like staying over because he had a fold down bed. I should have looked into it more to see if anything else was going on.
14. There was a fee difference for boys who boarded and boys who did not. I think ad hoc boarding was twenty pounds per night. MYW didn't change to be a full time boarder which was much more expensive.
15. MYW only boarded on a Friday night apart from a couple of weeks when I had a bad accident at a water park when I was on holiday during October half term in 2005. I wasn't allowed to fly home so MYW flew home with some friends we had met on

holiday and he boarded at Merchiston Castle for ten or twelve days until I was well enough to fly home.

16. When he started primary six in September 2005 everything started to go downhill with his mental health. Quite near the beginning of primary six I became aware that there was a problem because his mood deteriorated. I was concerned that it was because I had met my new partner because before that it had always been me and him.
17. I found MYW very difficult to manage when he was in primary six. He started having angry outbursts and behaving very negatively towards me. He would tell me that he hated me and we had always been so close. I blamed the fact that I was in a new relationship for everything that was going wrong with him. Because he had been so happy at the school for the previous two years I couldn't believe that the problem lay with the school.
18. MYW wasn't happy boarding on the Friday night. He was always moaning about it but the only thing he said was that he wasn't given a proper bed. He was given a fold out bed because he wasn't a regular boarder. He didn't like it but he put up with it because I explained that I needed to have a night off.
19. He started having panic attacks at home in January 2006 because he didn't want to go to school. I had to stop sending him then because he couldn't cope with going. He was really anxious about the whole school thing and I felt he couldn't step up with the transition in primary six. One morning when it was time to get up and go to school he just started screaming and I couldn't make him stop. He said he couldn't go to school and he wouldn't go. I didn't know what to do so I just had to ring up the school and say that I couldn't take him.
20. That was when I took him to see the doctor. I can't remember which doctor we saw but she was from Morningside Medical Practice. I told the doctor he was refusing to go to school and that he seemed anxious and panicky. He was sweating. The doctor said that perhaps it was too much of a high pressure environment for MYW and

that he wasn't coping with the work. I ended up just not sending him back to school. This was just after Christmas 2005.

21. Mr Brown, the Pringle housemaster, came to the house after MYW refused to go and asked him what was going on. He told him he was a 'Merchy' boy but MYW just said he wasn't going back. He absolutely refused to go back. Prior to that MYW had been doing well at school. He had done really well in his exams. He was a clever little boy.

Leaving Merchiston Castle School

22. Once I had promised MYW that he wouldn't have to go back, he told me that the main reason he hated school was because the other boys had been ridiculing him about his penis [REDACTED]
23. I asked MYW how the other boys had seen his penis and he explained that after sport on a Saturday morning they had showers. I don't know if the showers were communal but I assume the changing rooms were. He said the other boys laughed at him when he was in the showers and teased him about his penis. I never spoke to MYW about his penis [REDACTED]
24. I told Peter Brown in person about this when I was driving him back to the school after he visited the house. It was reported at the time that one of the main reasons MYW was leaving was because he was being ridiculed about his [REDACTED] penis. He just said something like that's what boys are like. Because MYW had left without giving a term's notice we had to pay another full term's fees. He left in January in the second term of primary six.

25. I also felt the parents at Merchiston Castle were an odd bunch. There was a lot of swinging going on and my husband and I had been propositioned by another female parent. I reported this to Peter Brown and I received an written apology from the headmaster, Andrew Hunter. I have obtained a copy of this letter from the school and provided it to the Inquiry.

Life after Merchiston Castle School

26. After Merchiston, I sent MYW to Rudolph Steiner school because at the time I just panicked and it had a reputation for being relaxed. They didn't have to wear uniform there. It was the complete opposite to the regime of Merchiston Castle where there was a strong focus on homework, studying, competitive sports and being respectful to their teachers. It felt like we had gone from one extreme to the other. MYW attended Rudolph Steiner for the rest of primary six and for a week of primary seven. He didn't do very well at Steiners but his dad didn't want me to move him again. MYW wasn't happy there because he wasn't allowed to play football, which he loved, and I wasn't happy because I felt there wasn't enough emphasis on his education. We briefly moved to Lancashire so he attended school there for the rest of primary seven before we moved back to Edinburgh.
27. We sent MYW to Firrhill High School at age twelve to start Senior One. This was local, mainstream education. It was just up the road from Merchiston Castle and was within our catchment area. MYW lived with his dad when he was at Firrhill quite a lot of the time because he didn't like my new partner.
28. As soon as MYW left Merchiston everything went downhill with his education. He started falling behind and all my high hopes of him being successful and having a good career disappeared. He got involved with a rough crowd at Firrhill and went completely off the rails. He got involved with drugs and left school with very few qualifications at sixteen. He wasn't able to go to university as I had always hoped he would.

Life after being in Merchiston Castle School

29. MYW is now twenty four years old. The last eight years have not been good for him. When he dropped out of school he had a drug possession charge and I paid the fine so that it wouldn't go on his record. Then he was arrested for the importation of drugs from Mexico but the charges were dropped due to prosecution errors. He was totally off the rails.
30. My mother, who was quite wealthy, bought MYW a flat in his own name so that he would always have a roof over his head. He was living independently, he had a fiancée and he started going to college. I thought everything was going to be alright but then he was violent towards his fiancée and she left him.
31. As soon as my mother died MYW sold his flat for around one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. He took all the money and impulsively said that he was going to America the following day. I never heard anything from him for years apart from the occasional text until September 2018 when he rang up and said that he needed to come home to Scotland because he had an abscess on his tooth and he couldn't afford to go to the dentist. He had lost everything and he needed me to pay for his flight. He pleaded with me to bring him home.
32. MYW's dad had residency in this country until MYW was sixteen and then he went back to America. MYW went to America to join him when he sold his flat but they fell out and MYW moved to Las Vegas.
33. MYW said that he couldn't afford to buy water at the airport before his flight back to Scotland. Of course I arranged for him to come home but I know I should have let him stand on his own two feet. I got him home and got him into a room in a house. I paid the rent for six months and financially supported him and got him back on his feet.

34. MYW's behaviour was abnormal and I found out later that he was taking LSD and crystal meth. He had developed a crystal meth habit when he was in America. He left crystal meth in my house and denied it was his so that is why I didn't allow him back into the house. He was behaving like he was bipolar. He ridiculed his brother and sister and he was nasty and abusive to me. He kicked in my car. He was very volatile. He was like Jekyll and Hyde but he refused to go to the doctor.
35. I told him after that that I couldn't afford to support him further as I am a nurse and don't have a large income. I also have two other children to support. I cut him off and told him he would have to get a job or get housing benefit because I wasn't supporting him anymore. He moved out of his flat and my friend saw him begging in the Meadows. He was living in a tent. I haven't seen him since.

Disclosure by MYW in 2018

36. In the first six months when MYW was back from America and I was seeing him we went to Peebles hydro for the weekend towards the end of 2018. MYW had smoked a joint and had a few drinks. We were playing a board game and MYW was talking about his future plans. I asked him whether he had ever regretted leaving Merchiston and he said no because he had been very unhappy about being teased and even a teacher called James Rainy Brown had encouraged the teasing about his penis by the other boys. He was quite matter of fact when he was telling me this. The conversation lasted about five minutes.
37. A few week later, after I had time to think about it, I told MYW that I thought this was a serious allegation and that we should inform the school but he refused to get involved because he didn't want anybody to know
38. MYW and I had no contact with James Rainy Brown prior to MYW being in primary six. James Rainy Brown had taught at Merchiston Castle for thirty or forty years. He was mainly in charge of sport at Merchiston Castle. He was a thin, tallish man and he was quite old, probably in his sixties. I had met him, usually on a

Saturday when I was collecting MYW from school after he had finished sport. I didn't have much to do with him but he came across as posh. He was always dressed in sports clothing.

39. A few years after MYW left the school, in approximately 2010 I found out from [REDACTED], the mother of [REDACTED] one of MYW's friends at Merchiston, that James Rainy Brown had allegedly made lewd comments to boys at Merchiston Castle and he took his own life before the police could interview him in relation to these allegations. He left over a million pounds to Merchiston Castle school and I felt that some of this money could have gone to the boys who had suffered at his hands.

Contact with Merchiston in 2019

40. I contacted the school by email in 2019. I told them they were supposed to be a charity and that MYW's life had been ruined by what had happened. I asked whether they had funds available for ex pupils who had fallen on hard times, especially because it was as a result of having to leave the school due to what a member of staff had done. They said that they did not have funds available and they refused to refund the school fees. They said that I would not be able to prove that what happened to MYW was a result of what had happened at school and they said they couldn't help out financially. I have provided the Inquiry with a copy of the emails.
41. After I contacted the school by email, I asked MYW if he would speak to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and he denied saying anything about James Rainy Brown. He said he was a really nice guy and that he wasn't going to get him into trouble. He warned me not to go to the papers or tell anyone. He said it was bad enough being ridiculed when he was at Merchiston Castle and that he didn't want anyone ridiculing him now after what he had been through.

Impact on MYW

42. I think what happened to him at Merchiston impacted the rest of his life. I think it gave him a negative view of his body and it reduced his confidence. I think it made him very self-conscious about his genitals. I think the negative experiences could have led to his drug use. I think if he had been able to stay at Merchiston and finish his education, he would have been a different boy to what he is now.

Impact on me

43. My relationship with MYW has completely broken down which is absolutely heart-breaking. I keep hoping he will get in touch. He sent my son and daughter a Christmas card in 2019 but I didn't get one from him .
44. I had such high hopes for MYW My dad was an eminent doctor and my family were successful in business. My mum worked hard to afford the best education for her grandson and everything that could be was done for him.
45. I am very cautious about the safety of my two other children who are aged six and eight and they have never stayed away from me overnight apart from on one occasion when my daughter, had a sleepover at brownies and I was very anxious about it. Once something has happened to one of your children you become very overprotective.
46. I have learnt to be more open with my other children. We do the NSPCC pantosaurus rhyme and I have a more open dialogue with them than I had with MYW. I never spoke about anything like this with MYW whereas my other son was able to come and speak to me when something inappropriate happened with another child at the child minder's.

Lessons to be Learned

47. I think the boys ridiculing ^{MYW} at Merchiston possibly arose because it was an all boys school. I think schools should be co-educational. I would never send my two younger children to a single sex school or a boarding school.
48. I don't think you can get rid of boarding schools altogether but there should be a female matron or somebody that the boys could go to and talk to.
49. I hope Merchiston admit that they got it wrong and that they compensate ^{MYW} and the other children who were victims of the comments of James Rainy Brown that affected their lives. I hope there is financial recompense to get ^{MYW} settled and I would also like him to have some counselling.

Other information

50. I got in touch with a lawyer, through my house insurance, after Merchiston refused to refund the school fees or give any financial help to ^{MYW} but they refused to take on my case because they didn't feel they had a high enough chance of winning and I couldn't afford to fund it privately. Also I knew that ^{MYW} would not provide a statement and it was just my word about what had happened.
51. 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... ^{FWQ}

Dated... 28-02-2020