

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MEF

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is MEF My date of birth is 1936. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I don't know where I was born. I have a birth certificate but it doesn't say. I think it was the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. I had three sisters, MDK and MDK and a half-sister MZW When we were sent to Australia, MZW came out later than MDK and I.
3. I think my mother had seven births altogether but I believe a set of twins died. There was MDK who is six years older than me MDK who was two years older, then myself, then MDK who is two years younger than me and lastly MZW who is six years younger.
4. I can't remember living as a family. Maybe we did during the war as MDK who has passed away, MDK and I all have MDK. On my shoulder, MDK ankle and MDK had a MDK on her leg. I remember being at my grandfather's place, but I can't remember that much. I think he was in the Craigentiny, Portobello area of Edinburgh.
5. I was in care in a number of places but I can't remember several of them. I think my mother was a bit of an alcoholic. She didn't really want us. I think I was in five or six places. The only one I remember is Nazareth House in Lasswade. I think I was ten years old.

Life in care - Scotland**Nazareth House, Lasswade***First day at institution*

6. I remember my mum dropped me off at Nazareth House in Lasswade. I'm not sure how long I was there. Anywhere between twelve and eighteen months. I slept in a dormitory. I think there were about ten to twenty boys in the dormitory. It was an old building. Half of it wasn't being used. The dorms were up the stairs. I think a couple of dozen of us walked to school. It was just boys there. I didn't have any drawers or a cupboard in the dorm, just a bed.

Mornings

7. In the mornings we got up, got dressed, had breakfast, went to mass, then school. We had to go to mass every morning before school. We had to wash up, clean up, make our beds and put our clothes away to be washed. Nobody supervised the washing up.
8. There were quite a few nuns there. Sister **LPY** was in charge. She was very cruel. There was Sister **LKF**. She was nice. I can't remember the names of any of the others. I can't remember what we got for breakfast. I think one of the senior boys woke us up.
9. There would have been some who had a problem with bedwetting. I didn't. I can't remember how it was dealt with.

Mealtimes

10. I can't remember having lunch at school and I don't remember anything about the food in the evenings.

Leisure time

11. We would play soccer. There wasn't much else to do. There was an orchard and a garden that we would play in. We played a lot of games inside the home. We didn't have to do any chores. I didn't run away from Lasswade. I did run away from other places in Scotland. I remember being picked up and asked where I was going. I'd say I was going home. I didn't know where home was. It wasn't the police that picked me up, it would have been other people. I don't know who.

Schooling

12. We went to school in Dalkieth. I can't remember the name of the school. We didn't have a uniform. We walked there but most of us didn't make it. We would go somewhere else. One of the senior boys walked us down to school. I didn't go that often. There were plenty of places to go, orchards and things like that. We used to steal the apples. We would go back to Nazareth House about 3:00 pm.

Religious instruction

13. There wasn't too much religious instruction. We went to mass every morning and all day on Sunday. The church was in the grounds of the home. You said grace before meals.

Christmas and Birthdays

14. I can't remember Christmases or birthdays. I had no visitors while I was there. The only time we went anywhere was when we went to the Forth Bridge. That's the only trip I remember.

Family

15. I didn't really know I had sisters at this time. I found out when I was on the boat to Australia. This was when we realised we were a family.

Nature and frequency of abuse

16. Sister **LPY** was in charge. She was a very cruel person. She was shocking. She made you kneel down and put your hand out to get the strap then she would belt you across the wrist. You didn't have to do much to get it, she was just cruel. Everybody copped it. She had a couple of pet kids. There was a boy there called **██████████** who was dropped off when he was a baby. He didn't get hit often. She belted him around a bit but nothing cruel.

Migration*Selection*

17. I can't ever remember getting asked if I wanted to go to Australia. I can't remember sitting any tests. We were told we were going. I didn't have a clue where Australia was. My sister **MDK** was asked if she wanted to go. She said everyone put their hands up. She thought she was going down to the shop for an ice-cream. My mum signed the papers for me to go. I can't recall who told me that. It was in conversation somewhere along the line.

Leaving Scotland

18. I remember getting on a bus and going to Middleton camp. I don't know where it was. There were hundreds of kids there. We were then sent to Liverpool or Southampton and got on the boat. I stayed at the camp for a week to two weeks. There were other boys I knew there but no friends really. They were all a bit older than me. **██████████** was about the same age. I can't remember much about the camp. I had no lessons and no talks about where we were going. I took nothing with me.
19. Before we left Lasswade we were all given a suit to wear. A jacket, shorts, shirt, tie and shoes. A proper suit. I didn't have anything else with me. From Middleton we were put on a bus. We were driven nearly all night before we were put on the boat. The SS Ormonde. We arrived in Fremantle in Western Australia in **██████████** 1947.

20. The first week or so was alright on the boat. I just remember every morning we would run down and look at the map. They would put up a thing about how far we had travelled. We were looked after pretty well on the boat. There was nobody really looking after us. I think there were two Christian brothers looking after the whole lot of us. I don't know their names. We were allowed to run wild. We just got up had breakfast and ran up and down the boat. We had one or two lessons on using the lifejacket and things like that. I used to get sunburnt a lot. I can't remember having sea sickness. I remember a lot of other boys did. It was more or less boring after the first week.
21. I can't remember how I found out, but my sisters [REDACTED] and MDK [REDACTED] were on the boat. They were on a separate part of the boat but we sat down and had all our meals together. When we got to Australia they separated us again. I never even knew where they went to when we got off the boat. They went one way and I went the other. I don't really know how I felt when I found out I had sisters on the boat. We hadn't been a family all our lives.
22. We had at least one stop but I didn't get off the boat, others did. I can't remember where it was. I know we came through the Suez Canal but I can't say whether we stopped there or not.

Life in care – Australia

Bindoon Boys Town, Western Australia

General

23. I remember landing in Australia. All the girls and boys were separated. I was hanging around wanting to get on the bus with my sisters. I thought I was going to the same place as them but I was told they were going on a different bus. I was taken right up to Bindoon. I didn't know where I was in Australia, I only knew it was West Australia.

24. There were at least a dozen boys with me. There were four or five I knew from Lasswade, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] he was older than us. I didn't make any friends on the journey. I met a few at Bindoon. There was a Christian brother driving the bus. I can't remember who it was.

First day at institution

25. I remember we stopped at the top of the hill and got out of the bus and looked down on Bindoon. It's only about sixty miles from Perth, Fremantle. It took over an hour or so to get there. When we looked down, the place was only half built. There wasn't much to see, it was all bush and country. You couldn't run away. It was in the middle of nowhere. They then took us down.
26. I can't really remember the first day. I was given a dormitory. The place was only half built so we were sort of jammed in. There were thirty or forty kids there then, then they kept coming in. About twelve months later there were about seventy there. The place was all on one level. There were a few boys there when I got there. The first group had come in August, we were the second or third group. We arrived in the [REDACTED] of 1947. There were about twenty boys already there when we arrived. I think there were two dormitories for all of us. There were about twelve to fifteen in each dormitory.
27. The clothes we had on were taken from us when we arrived at Bindoon. We were given some old clothes and something to eat. That's the last I saw of shoes for four years. We were never given shoes to wear.

Mornings

28. It was the same sort of regime as Nazareth House, getting up, going to mass every morning, breakfast and school, or working. There wasn't any school room for the first three months, until Brother ^{MDJ}[REDACTED] came back from Ireland.

29. There used to be a bell ringing to get you up. A Christian brother walked down the row of beds ringing a bell. We made our bed. It was mass before breakfast, in the church there. It was more or less beside where we had breakfast.
30. Quite a lot of boys had a problem with bedwetting. They got belted around a bit and had the wet sheets put on their heads. I was lucky, I never wet the bed.

Mealtimes

31. Breakfast was a couple of pieces of bread dipped in dripping. It was too bad if you didn't like it. You'd go hungry. I can't remember much about lunchtime or tea time. Breakfast is the only thing that sticks out in my mind. We were always hungry.

Washing and bathing/Hygiene

32. We had showers at Bindoon. It was a community shower. There was a shelf that you would hang your clothes then go and have a shower, come back and put the clothes on again. You had one set of clothes. We had a shower every night but then put on the same clothes every day, until the Saturday.
33. On a Saturday morning we got our clothes washed and got clean ones to wear. We had nuns there who looked after the laundry. They stayed there. They did the cooking and the laundry.

Schooling

34. After I was at Bindoon for three months, Brother MDJ came back from Ireland and they used to try to get us to go to school. There was one brother there who would try to teach us. His name was Brother McDonald. We would get about an hour of schooling a week. We would just get into class then we were all needed out in the building site when the truck came with supplies.
35. There was nothing to say about the schooling. Absolutely nothing. I could read and write when I left there, but only just. I taught myself a lot after I left. There was

another Brother called Brother **AKL**. He was the secretary of Bindoon. He gave me twenty pounds when I was leaving. I think it was for all the work I had done.

Healthcare

36. There was no doctor at Bindoon. One of the nuns had a bit of experience. If you had a cut or something, she would bandage you up. I can't remember her name. If you were ill you went to the Royal Perth Hospital. I had tonsillitis while I was at Bindoon. I spent about a week in hospital getting my tonsils out. I had trouble eating breakfast one morning and I couldn't swallow and it was discovered I had tonsillitis.
37. I remember having a toothbrush and toothpaste. A dentist came in and checked your teeth. I had two teeth out when I was there.

Work

38. I mainly worked in the dairy. Initially there wasn't a dairy and I would work on the buildings, mixing cement and unloading bricks. I was eleven and a half to twelve years old. There wasn't a cement mixer, you mixed it with a shovel. There were four or five of us mixing cement. They had a brick machine there that made bricks. I can't remember how it worked. Before they got the press for the bricks we had to go to the quarry and dig out rocks using a pick. The bigger boys dug them out and we would pick them up and load them on to the truck. The rocks were as heavy as you could lift. One of the Christian brothers would be supervising. Brother **MDY**. We called him because . He was terrible.
39. We didn't have any protective hat on. I remember my nose getting sunburnt a lot. I used to get in a few fights because I had a scabby nose for months and months. Later on, just before I left, they got some old ex-army hats. They gave us a few of them but they were too big for us. Nobody liked wearing them anyway. While we were working we never had anything on our feet. We didn't have shoes for four or five years. I got a pair of rubber boots with six months to go, by which stage I was running the dairy.

40. Brother **MDY** would drive the truck and go and pick up bags of cement with a couple of the older boys. They used to bag it themselves. We didn't have any trolleys there. We had a few wheelbarrows and picked up the bags of cement in them.
41. Nobody complained. There were a few broken finger nails and blisters. It was useless complaining. When you reached fourteen years old you didn't go to school at all, you worked permanently.
42. When I started working in the dairy, I would get up in the morning, go to mass and when everybody went to breakfast I went out and brought the cows in for milking and I'd feed them. That was my job from when I was fourteen until I left the place. I got breakfast after I brought the cows in. I then cleaned out the dairy and put the cows back in the paddock. I fed the pigs and brought the cows back in for afternoon milking. There were at least twenty cows. They were all hand milked by other boys. Sometimes I would separate the milk and make the butter. In the afternoon I would work in the orchard and water the young plants. I think there were 17000 acres in the whole place.
43. I would take the milk up to the dairy and get the scraps from the kitchen to feed the pigs. I don't know how many there were, quite a few. There was a gentleman there looking after the pigs. I just used to bring the scraps down for them. After work I would go for a shower. If I was quick enough I would get down for tea, if not, I would go hungry.

Christmas and Birthdays

44. Birthdays were just another day in Bindoon. At Christmas some people would make donations. I can't remember getting anything. I never had anything of my own while I was there. I don't think we got a different meal on Christmas day. We maybe had a longer mass, went to church more often.

Visits/Family

45. It was a couple of years after I was at Bindoon that I found out that my sisters were in an orphanage. I think someone took me down to see them. I would be about fifteen or sixteen. They were in St Joseph's Orphanage in Subiaco. [MZW] was there by that time too. She had come out to Australia later. I was only there for about an hour or so. On the Tuesday or Thursday Brother [MDY] drove the truck to get supplies. He dropped me off, then after I visited I had to make it to a Christian brothers place in St Georges Terrace to get picked up.
46. My mother came over later on. She came over herself. She remarried when she was out here. She tried to get us all together. I was maybe fourteen or fifteen. It was too late by then. I met her and my sisters met her. This was before I left Bindoon. I was taken to meet her. I can't remember much about it. We were separated so long that there were no feelings whatsoever.

Discipline

47. We didn't really do anything that wrong to be honest. We just got belted for the sake of it half the time. There was a couple of boys who couldn't handle it there, they would set traps for the brothers on the building site. They were sent back to Scotland or England.
48. It was rough in Bindoon. Brother [MDJ] had one intention in life. He wanted us to build the place, and that is all we did. Apart from that it could have been worse I suppose. It could have been a lot better too.

Nature and frequency of abuse

49. When Brother [MDJ] arrived back from Ireland things changed. We would go to school for an hour or so, after which we were treated like slave labour, under the harshest conditions. We worked until dusk each and every day, in the fields, on the quarry and the farm but mostly working on the building site, which was made from large rocks from the quarry. We were deprived of proper schooling.
50. Most of the brothers used sadistic methods to control and punish us. The worst was Brother [MDJ] This man took great pleasure in flogging us with his heavy walking

stick, which he had with him at all times. I can't say all the brothers were sadistic. There was Brother ^{MDW} [REDACTED], who was a wonderful man and Brother ^{LZO} [REDACTED], who I grew quite fond of.

51. One morning I couldn't eat my breakfast. I had not been long at Bindoon at this stage. Breakfast was the two pieces of bread dipped in hot dripping. I didn't feel well, so I passed my bread to the boy beside me. Immediately I felt this awful bang. I was hit from behind. I got up, turned around and bang, I was knocked down again. I was then given a good kicking. I can't remember the rest, but the boys told me I was picked up by the ears by Brother ^{MDJ} [REDACTED], my face shoved into the greasy bread and told to stay there until I ate the lot. I can't remember the rest of the day, but that night I went to the sick room. The sister there told me I had tonsillitis.

52. Numerous stories could be told of such things but it would take more than a book to write it all. I will never forgive them for what they did to my very best friend, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who was like a brother to me. Early in 1950, around March or April, there were police everywhere. We just thought someone had run away again. At mass next morning we were told that [REDACTED] was in an accident and he was dead. They said a truck ran over him. We were told to go from mass, out the side door and we had to file past [REDACTED], who was lying on a table with just a towel across his middle. I didn't recognise him at first because of the mess he was in. I remember [REDACTED] last words to me, "MEF [REDACTED] when I make some money I will come back and take you away from this slave camp".

53. When I had prayed for [REDACTED] soul, we were told to go and have breakfast. I remember a few of the boys vomiting, some even fainted. I was so shocked it took a few days before it hit me. I tried to run away but only got as far as the main road. The flogging I got did not worry me as I was still in shock. I still have nightmares about having to look at my best friend's mangled body. At that time I was only thirteen years old.

54. While I was working in the dairy and bringing the cows in twice a day, during the summer wasn't bad, but during the winter my feet would freeze. I soon learnt to walk

behind the cows and step into the hot dung as it came straight from the cow to stop my feet from freezing. Sometime later Brother LZO bought me some rubber boots.

55. The first two years at Bindoon were bad enough, with mental and physical abuse. I got used to the lumps, bumps and bruises, but the sexual abuse I will take to the grave with me. One Sunday evening I was sent up to Father MPG room to talk about being an altar boy. When I got there he asked me about the impure thought I was having, as I'd been to confession that morning. The next thing I know, my pants are down to my ankles. I am not going into the gory detail as this is hard enough to put to paper, but my first sexual experience was with a paedophile priest.
56. This went on until I turned fourteen. One day I was out in the bush with Brother LZO looking for a new site to shift bees and hives to. We were saying what a good life a beekeeper's was. He was telling me when I get a block of land from Bindoon he would help me get started. He was saying I will get married, have children and have a good life. That was when I lost it and started to cry and sob. He came over to me, he thought I had been bitten by a snake. He put his arm around me and I started to punch him but he wrestled me to the ground and shook me and asked what the matter was. I told him what MPG had been doing to me.
57. Two or three days later Brother LZO came back to me. He told me to try to forget it. He said it will never happen again and made me promise to tell no-one. I have not even told my wife about this part of my life at Bindoon.
58. I believe I am a good Christian person, but I could not stand the sight of a Christian Brother or a priest for a very long time. I have no vendetta against the Catholic Church, it was not the church that did this to me. All these brothers and the priest will be dead now, so I hope God has mercy on their souls.

Reporting of abuse

59. I never reported the abuse I suffered at Bindoon. Who could you complain to?
 Brother ^{MDJ} [REDACTED] brother was a senior police officer in Perth. I think he was the
 [REDACTED] Nobody complained.

Life after the institutions

60. One day I was told I was leaving. I was told to get a shower, get my gear and get ready to go. I was sixteen in the [REDACTED] and I think I left there in [REDACTED] I knew they got rid of everyone when they were sixteen. The child endowment they got paid for us stopped when you were sixteen so you were no good to them. They weren't making any money out of you.
61. I had no preparation for leaving. One day you were there, the next you were leaving. I was on my own and didn't know where I was going. They said they had a job for me and it was out in the country somewhere and that was it. I met these people and they took me down to some farm. The town was called Newdegate. It was a sheep farm. I didn't know much about sheep. The family were called the Kirwins. They only used me. They wanted a holiday and left me to run the place. They were away for about six weeks. There were about five hundred to a thousand sheep spread over there. There was a son who dropped in once a week to check on me. I made my own food. I'd never done that before. I had to kill a sheep there to eat. When they came back from holiday they said I wasn't suitable and put me to another place.
62. The other farm was owned by a family called McGlynn. That was even worse. They also left me for weeks. When they returned they said I would get a bonus if I helped with the harvest. I did this but got nothing so I walked off. I was picked up by the local priest. I knew him as I went to church every Sunday. He took me back to Perth and dropped me off at the child welfare place there. I was then sent up to a dairy in a place called Bullfinch. I was sent to every one of these places by the Christian brothers. This was owned by the Young family. I stayed there for two years, from seventeen to nineteen years old. That was good.

63. After this I thought enough was enough and I left and looked after myself. I got a job in a shearing shed as a shearer and moved around a lot. I decided to come to Queensland. I was moving between jobs and [REDACTED] my wife, was on a bus trip and we happened to stop at the same private hotel. She was going to Melbourne. I decided to go down there and we met up. I got a job with Dandanell General Motors but they closed down. I was running out of money and [REDACTED] dad got me a job at the airport. He was a tarmac foreman. [REDACTED] and I were married when I was twenty-four and [REDACTED] was eighteen. I was going to get paid off again so I got a job in West Australia as a shearer, so we moved back there. We had our first child in Fremantle and we've been together nearly sixty years. We have two sons.
64. [REDACTED] didn't know anything about my life in Bindoon before we were married. I just said it was a bit rough. I became an alcoholic for a while. I didn't really start drinking until I was twenty-four. It lasted a few years then I got over it. It was mainly when I was travelling around shearing, a few weeks at a time. When I came back to Queensland I got home every second or third weekend. I started shearing when I was married and kept it up until I retired when I was about sixty years old. Then I had a milk run until I was sixty-five.
65. How I was treated in Bindoon hasn't really influenced how I've been with my own kids. I took my oldest son out shearing for a while. He had a bad marriage, stopped shearing and got a job. He travels a lot, flies to Darwin. He's a month on and a week off. He's done well for himself.
66. We have another son, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and I have the same blood group, one positive, one negative and when [REDACTED] was born he needed a complete blood change. He got cerebral palsy and he is deaf. So he was a handful and he kept [REDACTED] going all the time. He's still with us now.
67. We couldn't have any more children after that, so we adopted a girl. She died of breast cancer last October. I don't really want to talk about that.
68. I saw my sisters after they left St Joseph's. I went to [REDACTED] MDK wedding. She had a bad marriage. Every time I was in Perth I used to go and see them, when I came back

from shearing. [REDACTED] and MDK became friends for a while as we were living near her. I'm the closest to MDK I used to stay at [REDACTED] when I was in Perth. She was in Bayswater, MDK was in Fremantle. I knew where they lived and I'd stay there.

69. MZW was in the newspaper when I was in Bindoon, when she came over here. A Christian brother showed me the picture of her getting off the boat and told me she was my sister. I can't remember who the brother was. She came a few years later and went straight to St Joseph's in Subiaco.
70. MDK has come over to the Gold Coast every year for the last three or four years. She is coming over in June this year. We go down for a couple of weeks. MZW came out a couple of times and we meet up there. MZW married and has two girls.
71. My mother got a job over here, in the railway. I got a job there too. I stayed there with her for three or four months but I couldn't put up with her new partner so I left. I was about twenty or twenty-one. I didn't really have much contact with her after that. MDK rang me up later and told me she had died.

Other action taken/ treatment / support

72. Sometime ago I applied to the Australian Redress Scheme. Someone got in touch with me about it, from Tuart Place or something. The government got in touch and said something about compensation. I completed the form. It was the Western Australian Government Redress. There was initially an age limit on compensation but they've done away with this. It has been settled now.
73. I still get letters from the Child Migrant Trust and get the magazine every couple of months. Counselling is there if you want it. It's too late to do me any good.

Records and family tracing

74. I have never tried to get my records. They wouldn't do me any good.

Other matters relating to migration

75. I have been shown a copy of a statement in relation to the Western Australia Redress Scheme and can confirm I wrote this along with my wife [REDACTED]. I have also been shown a register from the Sisters of Nazareth and can confirm that the details on this are mine, along with my parents. As well as this I have been shown an extract from the HMS Ormonde and can confirm the details shown to me, as being on the ship, are also mine.
76. I have Australian citizenship. I don't have a passport. When I was with Tuart Place, if I wanted a passport I could have got one. They would have helped with trips to Scotland if I had wanted to go. MDK [REDACTED] has gone a couple of times. It isn't for me. I definitely still see myself as Scottish but I'm proud to be Australian too. I get an Australian pension. It wasn't difficult.
77. When I was in Western Australia I played soccer. I tried to join a club there. When I was here and my oldest son was thirteen, he played soccer. I coached the team and some of the dads were Scottish. Our next door neighbour is Scottish. [REDACTED] father was born in Scotland. You've got to keep hold of something.

Impact

78. I don't really think about Bindoon too much. It was rough but it was what it was. It definitely impacted on my education. It affected me getting a job at first. I applied for a few jobs and didn't get any of them. When I was seventeen or eighteen I tried to join the army but didn't even have the education to do that. I got into shearing and they were good people. I'm eighty three in [REDACTED] and think my health is still pretty good.
79. Our time in care has affected my sisters and I. You aren't a family really. We have been able to build a relationship. We've been quite happy with the outcome I suppose.

Final thoughts

- 80. At the time I was in Bindoon nothing could be different. It was what it was. I wasn't the only one. There were hundreds of us there. There were over 7000 of us came out here, there's only 2000 left. I couldn't advise anything really. If there was anything to come out of this, it would be to just don't let it happen again. I don't think it will happen again.

- 81. 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... MEF

Dated... *15-5-2019*