

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Veronica ALTHAM

Support person present: No

1. My name is Veronica Altham. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1952. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. My father's name was [REDACTED]. I have no idea what my mother's name was. I think her surname was [REDACTED]. I have no interest in her whatsoever. I was born in [REDACTED] Dunfermline. My mother then became pregnant by another man and she left [REDACTED]

3. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] My father died in 1976. I don't know when my mother died.

4. My mother moved from where she was in Dunfermline to Stirling. Apparently my father took [REDACTED] to London. I can't remember that. He then couldn't cope so asked Barnardo's to help. He told them [REDACTED] n't to be adopted.

5. I was in Haldane House, Bridge of Weir, and Ravelrig House in Balerno before I went to Balcary. They were all Barnardo's homes.
6. I was about eighteen months to two years old when I went into care. I remember Haldane House because they had big sinks. You got washed in one then you were moved to another and dried. [REDACTED] also in Ravelrig, Balerno, for a short while. Why I remember is that we used to have to go to sleep after lunch on camp beds. I'd only ever slept in a real bed.

Balcary House Children's Home, Hawick

7. I think the reason [REDACTED] moved to Balcary House in Hawick was because [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] So I was about two years old [REDACTED] went to Balcary.
[REDACTED]

First day

8. [REDACTED] went into Balcary and met Marmagee, which is Indian for mother. She was the matron, in charge of the home. There was a table in the hall with funny big legs and I hid under there. [REDACTED] called me 'Roni' right up till that day, but in Balcary we had to use our proper names. Marmagee's real name was Hilda May O'Brien, or Fanny O'Brien when she was out of earshot. She was wonderful. She had her own flat next to the medical room. That's where we got trained how to set up a tea table. We all had jobs to do and if you were with her you'd learn to set up the tea table for her and do tea and sandwiches perfectly.
9. From outside the home you walked up steps into a vestibule, then into the big hall. The staff living room was to the right. There was a piano in it and a big fire. You went into the corridor and Marmagee's office was there. Down the corridor was the big girls and little girls playrooms. There were two cloakrooms for polishing your shoes when you came back from school. Next there was an outside toilet because when we were playing outside we could use it. Round the corner was the boys cloakroom

and toilets, same as ours. You passed the toilet and went upstairs where there was a huge boys playroom. They had a divider so that if the staff wanted it to be quieter for the younger boys they used this and the bigger boys had the other half of the room. I was in the Elves initially and we shared a playroom with the Robins and the big girls had the room at the end.

10. In the hall, on the left was our massive dining room. As you came out there were two pantries, where we did all the washing up. As you came out there was a kitchen and scullery. Right at the back were two laundry rooms.
11. There was a huge staircase that took you up to the next floor. From the stairs you go up and to the right was the Elves room, which was a dormitory of six girls. Next was the Robins room, which was a dormitory with eight girls in it. There was an adjoining door that led to a room where a member of staff slept. The aunties that looked after each dorm. There was auntie **BDA** auntie June, auntie Jasmine and Hutchy, who was a member of staff, she looked after me. Along the corridor was the Pixies room then Marmagee's entrance to her flat where we didn't go. After this was auntie Jasmine's bedroom.
12. There were two boys rooms, senior boys and middle boys down a back staircase. The big boys had two rooms. As you go towards the back and down a few stairs there were two boys dormitories. On the first level was the Pixies bathroom and a toilet on its own, then the Elves bathroom. You went up a flight of stairs and there was most of the staff, a sewing room and the senior girls rooms. When you were old enough you got your own room. I was an Elf initially, then in the Robins, then the intermediates, then in the seniors. The staff addressed me as Veronica. It was always first names.
13. The boys and girls were separated at night to sleep, but after tea time and once you'd polished your shoes and done your homework we all played outside together. My gang were boys and girls. There was **BHG**, Marjory McFarlane, now Myles, **[REDACTED]**, **[REDACTED]** and **[REDACTED]** she's dead now, and **BKZ**. **[REDACTED]** was also one of the gang.

14. There were between 28 and 32 children in Balcary. **BHG** came having stayed with her mother, who was on her own and mentally challenged. She took her out, put her back in, out again, then back in. **BHG**, Marjory and I are still in touch on Facebook. I am still in touch with **BKZ** too.
15. I had a period out of the home. I was fostered but I don't like to talk about it. I was away from Balcary for about a year to eighteen months. I hated the foster carers. I didn't have any say about foster care. I was five. It was Barnardo's decision. **[REDACTED]**

Foster Care – Mr & Mrs **BKD/SPO, **[REDACTED]** Perth**

16. My foster carers were Mr and Mrs **BKD/SPO**. They stayed at **[REDACTED]**, Perth. They were Salvation Army people. They were as false as can be. I was sort of hurt, maybe not physically, but I was hurt enough. I wasn't allowed to eat with them. I ate in the kitchen and they ate in the dining room. When I returned to Balcary I was suddenly wetting the bed and wetting my pants. I wouldn't let anyone near me, but it went over their heads and it was put down to me just being a naughty child.
17. The **BKD/SPO** lived in a prefab. They had a daughter called **[REDACTED]**, who was the same age as me. You came in the back door and there was a kitchen, then the living room, then **[REDACTED]** bedroom, my bedroom and then theirs. Mr **BKD** had a thing about the bible. I had to read it for hours. I couldn't read a word.

Abuse at Mr & Mrs **BKD/SPO, **[REDACTED]** Perth**

18. Mr **BKD** was handy with his belt. The worst thing he did was, he used to put his penis just inside my bum cheeks. Nobody picked up on it. Anyone who had half a brain, who worked in social work nowadays would pick up on it. Why would I come back and start wetting my bed twice a night.

19. I have no idea how old the [BKD/SPO] were. He was a big man to me. He's bound to be dead by now. The abuse happened when I read the bible at the dining room table. His wife and [REDACTED] were in their rooms. I have no idea if she was aware.

20.



Leaving foster care

21. I left the [BKD/SPO] because I decided to run away. There was a shop on the top of a hill and I went there and stole a box of cornish mivvies. I sat on the road eating them thinking how I was going to get to Hawick. Mr [BKD] must have called the police and they picked me up. I've hated him all my life.

22. Gladys Fraser, my welfare officer took me away from them. I remember I came home from school and she told me to get changed and pack my things. I was taken to Douglas House at the Sick Children's Hospital in Edinburgh. A psychiatric unit. It had a big walled garden.

23. I was in Douglas House for about nine months. We stayed in the huts at the back. There was a wonderful lady there called Sister Meechan and she put me next to her office because I kicked off as they only had a cot for me. There was no way I was sleeping in a cot, trapped. So she got me a bed. I saw a psychiatrist while I was there.

Returning to Balcary House Children's Home, Hawick

24. I specifically remember going back to the home from Edinburgh Sick Children's Hospital. I went to Glasclune children's home in North Berwick. Once a year Balcary swapped with Glasclune for a couple of weeks, as a summer holiday. So every year we were at the seaside. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I was more interested in seeing if my friends were still there. They were.
25. Once a week I had to see a psychiatrist. I didn't speak to him. He used to try to wind me up. I'm just angry about it. I can't believe nobody could see there was something wrong. I started playing up, but was told I was naughty. After a while I settled back in again. I was so happy to be back to my friends. I didn't tell anyone. I couldn't trust anyone to tell them.

Routine at Balcary House Children's Home, Hawick*Mornings and bedtime*

26. Whoever your auntie was on duty would get you up in the morning. You would then make your bed. We got up about seven o'clock, at the breakfast table for eight then out the door for school at half past eight.
27. Before breakfast you did your chores. You did whatever was on the rota for that week. Setting the table, making the toast or sweeping the playrooms. You would put polish on the floors then use a big bumper to polish them, all before breakfast. You could also dry the cutlery, wash and dry the dishes or clean down the kitchen and dining room. You could get Marmagee's tea at night. If you did this you only did basics in the morning.
28. Marmagee had her own high tea. You had a week of doing this as your chore. You had to do it right. I'd do it every four weeks. I'd take a couple of Craven A cigarettes from her bag when I did this. I was about seven years old.

29. We used to get our age in pennies and she'd make us put a ha'penny in the Barnardo's box for our keep.
30. Bedtime differed for different age groups. We could read in bed at night. On a Sunday, we would get stories read to us during the day. We were read religious stories. The matron or a member of staff would read books to us.

Mealtimes / Food

31. The breakfast was cooked by the staff members Hutchy or Cookie Pollock. As you walked into the dining room, Marmagee's table was first, it was a huge table. I sat beside her. The tea pots were on the next table. One day Cookie slipped and the tea pots fell on top of her. She was so badly burnt. She was there for ages, then we got Ma Summers. Hutchy was like the back-up cook, Nora Hutchison. She had permanent nicotine hair. She never had a cigarette out of her mouth. I loved her, she was great.
32. Breakfast was really good. Dinner was a nightmare. On Sunday you got roast beef for dinner. It was put in at nine o'clock and we got it when we all came back from church. It was really tough. It was like boot leather. If you didn't eat it you got it for tea.
33. Monday to Wednesday wasn't bad but on Thursday we got liver. It was disgusting. I wouldn't eat it and then have to eat it in the morning. Friday was disgusting too. It was fish that had been stewed in water for four hours. But you had to eat them. If I didn't eat it, I got it for breakfast. You weren't force fed, but you were told you will eat it. We said Grace before every meal.
34. Marmagee had a big huge table. As a baby I sat next to her. The older you got, you moved up the table. When you were old enough and could eat with a knife and fork you moved to one of the other tables. There was a circle of eight tables around the big table and eventually you went on to one of them. There was a back table, called

the naughty table, you had to sit at if you didn't eat your meal. Marmagee was always present at meal times apart from tea time.

Washing / bathing

35. We bathed six nights a week. On a Sunday, the Lord's day, we would have a strip wash before church. We were separated to different churches as not one church could handle us all. Then we went to bible classes, then we'd come home to dinner, the disgusting roast beef. We then got a story and had to sing choruses and hymns all night.
36. You didn't share a bath, everyone had their own bath time. But I could sit and chat to **BHG** You could talk to your mate while they bathed. The staff supervised bath times when you were younger.

Clothing / uniform

37. We didn't wear a uniform in Balcary. We did have school uniforms, at primary and high school. I remember it was a green and yellow tie at primary school.
38. We would all go up to the sewing room and get kitted out with all our holiday clothes. I waited three years for an outfit I really liked. **[REDACTED]** had it first, but I finally got it.

School

39. You'd do your chores then go to school. I went to Drumlandric St Cuthbert's primary school. I had went to Hawick High school during nursery years. I got dissentry then and when I went to hospital Cookie Pollock was there with her burns.
40. I stayed at Drumlandric until the end of primary then went to Hawick High school. We walked to school. It was about a mile and a half. I always remember walking with my mates. As we got older we would jump on the bread van that delivered to the home,

right into town and roll off by the school. We walked home at lunch time. We had proper cooked meals at lunch time, like mince and tatties. The food was quite stodgy, but we had proper meals. Then we'd walk back to school then home at the end of school.

41. When we got back from school, we would get changed, polish our shoes, do our homework, have our tea then go out to play. We had loads of things to do. There were toys, I was a big reader. There were hundreds of books. People handed them in. I loved Enid Blyton and The Borrowers. If we were outside there was a big area to play in. There were two cottages in the back garden and a wooded area right at the back. The cottages were our play houses. We used to make eggy bread behind them.

Trips / Holidays

42. During the holidays we had the same routine but just played outside after breakfast and chores. We went on holiday for two weeks to Glasclune Children's Home in North Berwick. They swapped with us every year. One holiday we went to Redcar. I don't think we enjoyed it as much.
43. Every Saturday morning we got free cinema. My biggest passion apart from reading was swimming and we got into the swimming pool for free. In the summer holidays, once I'd done my chores I'd be down at the swimming pool. We swam in the river too. We couldn't do that without a member of staff being there.

Birthdays and Christmas

44. Christmas was wonderful. The older children got up, went to the kitchen and made the staff toast and tea and gave them breakfast in bed and sang carols. We would then get changed and go down to the dining room. At breakfast we got gifts from friends and family at the table. Next to the big playroom, we would sing 'Why are we waiting', outside Marmagee's office, as she had locked the door. She'd come and

open the door and we all went in. I thought Santa Claus was brilliant because he had all the presents laid out in order. All the elves together, robins, pixies and so on.

45. A local guy called Dobson came every year with his snow cart piled up with presents and knocked on the window and spoke to us all.
46. When we went to church on Christmas morning we could take one gift. We would have a proper Christmas dinner, crackers and everything. In the afternoon we did what we wanted to. In the evening we would watch a Christmas film. Everything you wanted you got. As a kid you didn't know things were second hand.
47. On your birthday you got presents from [REDACTED] and the home. At Easter we got lots of eggs. Cadbury's had a competition that the best home got a giant egg. We won it every year. The chocolate was really thick. The matron used an axe to cut it.

Visits / Inspections/ Review of Detention

48. My father never visited. When I was seven or eight, Marmagee [REDACTED] [REDACTED] had a letter from my father and it had said he had remarried [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] He stayed at [REDACTED] Enfield, Middlesex. I was six when I last wrote to him. I'd got a Noddy book and a box of chocolates from him. It didn't affect me when I wasn't going to see him again.
49. I saw a Dr Methwin, a psychiatrist, every couple of months but had no social work visits. I didn't tell Dr Methwin anything. She sat me on her knee, at seven years old. I didn't take her seriously.

Healthcare

50. We had access to doctors and a dentist. I hated the dentist. He'd come to the home and give you a small filling with no pain relief.

Running away

51. I ran away once with BHG. We went into the town. A police car came and we hid behind a van. Then I heard the police man call my name. The van had moved and we didn't know. We were taken back to the home. That was when the Barron's came.

Bed Wetting

52. I was a bed wetter. I started when I was nearly six. Every morning they would make the bed wetter's wash our own sheets in a big Belfast sink, put them through the mangle and hang them up. All the beds had rubber sheets on them. I wet the bed twice a night. First time by ten at night and another time by morning. I was a bed wetter until I left the home. There were four of us that wet the bed, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
53. Miss BKE was the only one who punished me for wetting the bed. She rubbed my face and someone else's in the wet sheets. She wasn't there long. Miss BKE wasn't an auntie. She wasn't what we were used to but she didn't stay long.

Friends

54. My friends in Balcarry were the [REDACTED], [REDACTED] who killed herself, [REDACTED] who had a mental age of seven, and [REDACTED] who is an alcoholic and BKZ [REDACTED], who has a phenomenal memory. In my room was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and Marjory McFarlane. In the big room there was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] BHG [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was our friend too. He is black and we wanted to know if his blood was red, so we all cut ourselves and became blood brothers. When

he arrived he was crying because it was mince, tatties and peas for tea. I ate it for him and we became friends. I'm still friends with [REDACTED] now.

55. BHG [REDACTED] and I were partners in crime. We'd arrange to go out at midnight and go fishing. We went to the new police station that was being built and I climbed on the crane there. BKZ [REDACTED] pulled the handle and as a result I have a scar on my leg.
56. BHG [REDACTED]'s mother went off and worked [REDACTED] in America BHG [REDACTED] came back. I think her mother killed herself in the end. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] His name was [REDACTED]. He was at Balcary too. I didn't have a lot to do with him as he was in the younger group. I went to visit BHG [REDACTED] in Sighthill, in Edinburgh, when I left the home. She was with her mother. I just wasn't comfortable in the house at all. Her mum was nuts.
57. We would go out at night to go fishing or swimming in the river. There was a salmon run up there. Then we'd go back to the home. Usually we would get back in no problem. When we went to the police station to play on the buildings BKZ [REDACTED] was convinced the flying squad were after us. We started running, two of us lost a slipper. We just ran. We climbed up the kitchen, ran up the roof and climbed in the window, then up the back stairs. BKZ [REDACTED] fell over and got us caught.
58. Balcary was my home. [REDACTED] There were rabbits and a cat and Dobby the donkey. We used to ride Dobby. We did terrible things to him. Sometimes we gave him a couple of victory 'V' sweets on a Saturday and he would jump and dance all over the field. Most importantly there was Bruce, a golden Labrador. I told him many stories.
59. During the day Marmagee was always there as well as about four staff. One for each dormitory. They stayed in adjoining rooms from the dorms. There were no relief staff. I would have noticed a stranger. They were all nice but Marmagee was the best one. I had no problems with any of the staff except Miss BKE [REDACTED] with the wet sheets. I was between eight and ten years old when she did this.

60. Marmagee was there until I was about eleven or twelve then Stuart and Joan Barron came. They are both dead now. They took over Marmagee's flat with their child. Everything changed. For a start, we had a man, which was unusual.
61. For a short while there was a couple called ma and dad Walker who came to Balcary. I think they came to see if they'd take over from Marmagee. To see if they were suitable. You couldn't expect children to call you mum and dad when they've only had Marmagee. We didn't want to call them mum and dad. They were only there a couple of weeks. I can't remember when they were there exactly.
62. Auntie Jasmine Thompson is still in touch with us on Facebook. Mrs BDA was the housekeeper. She did all the sewing and sorted all your clothes out. She used to chase us and say she'd 'malafuster' us if she got a hold of us. That's the only time I've ever heard that word.

Discipline

63. I got the belt at school for being mischievous. You got the cane if you were naughty at Balcary, or Bruce the Labrador's lead. Marmagee carried this out. One time I got it on the bare bottom, well not the bare bottom but thin pyjamas. This was when we were caught hanging out the window watching people coming to a ball. You got ten seconds of it. I never touched my toes, my first thought was to protect my head. The belt was worse.
64. The Barron's didn't use a cane. They would embarrass you in front of everyone by making comments about you, snide remarks. They didn't stand a chance because we hated them before they entered the home. They were taking Marmagee's place. I can honestly say he never lifted his hands to me. As far as I know he didn't believe in the cane.
65. One Christmas I was in the office. I came out and Dr Methwin turned up and asked if I'd stolen the telephone money. I asked why I'd take the telephone money and she said, "Well, somebody stole it". This was before Christmas. In [REDACTED] on my

birthday she was still going on about it. She spoiled my day out. She eventually apologised as she found out an older boy, [REDACTED], had taken the money. I had been in the room with him.

Abuse at Balcary House Children's Home, Hawick


66. I didn't see myself as being abused while I was at Balcary. I didn't see the cane as abuse. Everyone got it. We waited outside her office and went in one by one. I had good friends there. The only thing that was bad was the thing with Miss BKE and the urine soaked sheets.
67. The only person that seriously abused me was Mr BKD. I was so terrified that he was going to push his penis harder. I think subconsciously I started peeing the bed because I thought if I was so dirty nobody would touch me down there.

Leaving Balcary House Children's Home, Hawick

68. I left Balcary when I was fifteen and a half. I was excited. I didn't want to stay at school. I sat my exams for the general education certificate. I left the home and Mrs Fraser, my welfare officer, arranged for me to have a Mrs Mac something teach me typing and a Mrs Petrie who put me through my English 'O' level. The first job I had was in the mill in Hawick, which I did for a week. That was enough.
69. I was initially put into a rough hostel in Edinburgh. Martin House in Albany Street. Miss Etheridge ran it. She was wonderful. I was in a dormitory again. I lived there and learnt a lot of bad habits. I was there for a while. I was definitely out of control.

70. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

71. Secondary Institutions - to be published later



72. While I was at borstal, Mrs Petrie, who took me for my English 'O' level asked Barnardo's if she could be my main carer. So after that I spent a lot of time with her. This started when I was at Guthries. She was my friend from then on. Her and her husband. She came to see me every week. I wasn't abused in the borstal. I can't ever remember going to court but I may have.

73. I was in Martin House on and off for a couple of years. Barnardo's were meant to be responsible for me until I was 21 but I never asked them for anything.

Life after being in care

74. I went to London and was staying at a Barnardo's hostel. I worked for a solicitor called Elliot McVie. I went back to Scotland because of a man, [REDACTED] who was married. After a while [REDACTED] asked if I was still with [REDACTED]. I told him I was so he asked me to go on holiday to Germany to get away from him. I went to Germany with [REDACTED] and met [REDACTED] my first husband. I was twenty years old.

75. I saw [REDACTED] for six months, got married and we were together for sixteen years. I have two children to him. [REDACTED] is my oldest, she is 43. My son [REDACTED] is 41. I have 5 grandchildren and a step grandchild. The bedwetting gradually stopped. It stopped completely when I got married. I was in a much more comfortable place.

76.



77. When I was in London I was out one day and needed the toilet. I went to where I knew my dad stayed at [REDACTED]. The woman there said to me, "You must be [REDACTED]". I asked to use the toilet. She said it was ok then said "You know [REDACTED] has emigrated". I just said ok, I didn't care. [REDACTED] I thought, "Ok, thanks for making my day" and walked off. He hadn't emigrated, he was just down the road. When my father died [REDACTED] told his wife that he had [REDACTED]
78. All I've ever done is work in the care service. All my life. I went to that office first and hated it. When I left I did care for Barnardo's. I then looked after two little Jewish boys. I loved that. I kept on in the caring service. I was abroad when I took my Nursery Nurse Examination Board, NNEB, and worked as a nursery nurse. The hours and holidays worked out well while my children were young. I was a kindergarten teacher after that.
79. After [REDACTED] and I separated I stayed on my own for six years. I worked for social services and worked in a bar, The Clink in Callington. Mainly for the company. That is where I met my present husband [REDACTED]. My surname had been [REDACTED] [REDACTED] came into the pub and asked me out several times. I kept saying no at first. We have been married for nineteen years now.

Impact

80. Barnardo's inability at the time to see a child who was damaged and just telling me I was a naughty child makes me angry. I found it very difficult to have relationships with my first husband.
81. I trust my husband but I find it hard to trust many people. 27 years ago I went to a house of a friend and consequently brought up the five children for her. They are a great support to me. My kids know them. I have a lot of support around me. I haven't told them about my abuse.

82. The only thing being in care has given me is the caring side because all my life I've been with social services. I worked in a school for autism, which I left after I had cancer. I had a heart attack about seven years ago. I think it's because of the steroids I was on. The nurse said that when I was in hospital.

83. I haven't had psychiatric help for years. I am on anti-depressants. I think due to diabetes, which makes you depressed. Last year I started getting depressed

[REDACTED]

Years ago I thought about committing suicide, after the home but I got up and got on with it. My granddaughter is ok now. She got 'A's in all her exams.

84.

[REDACTED]

It really shook my faith in my ability to judge someone. It took me back to Barnardo's. People I trusted let me down.

85. Balcary was a good experience for me as a whole.

[REDACTED]

Reporting of Abuse

86. I have never reported the abuse I suffered to the police or anyone. I told my psychiatrist in Canada. Marmagee, Mrs Petrie and Miss Etheridge were all positive influences on me but I didn't discuss my abuse with any of them.

Records

- 87. I applied for my records about fifteen years ago and a social worker came down with them. They were appalling. I asked who half of them were for. They weren't true. I ripped them up and threw them in the bucket. When they changed from microfilm to computer some people's records were mixed up.

Lessons to be Learned

- 88. The only thing where I was concerned was that they should have known there was something wrong with me when I came back from foster care. I was always arguing. I was wetting the bed, wetting my knickers. These things should be picked up in a child.

Other information

- 89. Since this has come up with the Inquiry, and Marjory and BHG have texted me, it's brought a lot of it back. I went to a reunion at Balcary last year. They are all going back. I'm not.
- 90. 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 

Dated 30-8-2018