

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MGS

Support person present: No

1. My name is ^{MGS} [REDACTED] My date of birth is the [REDACTED] 1971. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I want to tell the Inquiry about the period of time I spent at a residential boarding school at St Columba's College in Largs, Scotland between 1978 and 1983. I attended this school for about five years and completed my primary school education there.

Life before going into care

3. I was born in Paisley outside Glasgow and my parents' names were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Both my parents passed away in 2018. My parents owned a pub on [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. I had family that lived in [REDACTED] and that is where I started to attend primary school. The first primary school I went to was [REDACTED]. I then spent about one year at St John Ogilvie in Paisley. I returned to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for a few months. I was at day pupil at these Catholic schools.
4. I have an older sister who my mum had when she was only fourteen. That sister was taken away from my mother thirty minutes after being born. I only met her for the first time about ten years ago. She is about 56 or 57 years old now. I was six or seven when my younger sister was born to my parents. I also have a half-sister from my father's second marriage.

5. It was then decided by my parents that I should attend St Columba's School in Largs which was a prestigious Catholic boarding school run by the Marist Brothers. It was [REDACTED] in 1978 and I was seven years old.
6. The reason that they were sending me there was because they were running a pub in [REDACTED] and a business in [REDACTED]. There was no child care in place to look after me as they were working all the time. Most of my family were involved in running the businesses.
7. In 1978 it was a status symbol to send your child to a fee paying boarding school especially a Catholic faith school. There were a lot of well-known Catholic families in the West of Scotland who had their children boarding at St Columba's

St Columba's College, Largs 1978 – 1983

8. The building itself was on three levels with a central stairwell. Dormitories one and two were on the top storey and room two looked out the front while room one looked over the back garden. Rooms three, four, and five were on the second floor. Room three looked over the back garden while rooms four and five looked out over the front driveway. Room five was the largest dormitory and had about eight beds.
9. As you got older you moved down stairs from dormitory one to dormitory five. The dormitories were allocated according to age. There was a single bedroom on each floor where the dormitories were where a Brother would sleep. I recall that Brother Germanus had his bedroom outside dormitory five. The house brother usually slept in the rooms near to the dormitories.
10. On the ground floor there was a dining room at the rear of the building. There was also a kitchen with a hatch. All the food was served through the hatch in ashets

11. The classrooms were all in the building next door to the main house. This building was also had the lodgings for the Brothers. There had been a lot of building work done on the Victorian style building to make it suitable to house a school. There were three classrooms and a large art area.
12. When I went to St Columba's there must have been twenty boys with fifteen boarders and about five day pupils. We were the feeder school for the Marist Brothers secondary schools at St Joseph's in Dumfries, St Mungo's in Glasgow and also St Aloysius in Glasgow.
13. I think that St Columba's closed in 1983 shortly after I left the school in the [REDACTED] of that year. I was there for about five years in total. I think that I was one of the last intakes of boys aged seven or less.

Routine at St Columba's College, Largs

First day

14. I recall it was a Sunday night in [REDACTED] 1978 when I first arrived at St Columba's. It was getting dark. The first person I met was Brother David Germanus who was the Headmaster. I was shown to my room and my parents helped me to unpack. I said brief farewells to my parents. I had never spent a night away from my parents or grandparents.
15. I spent the first three nights crying myself to sleep. Come the weekend I didn't want to go home as we had huge grounds to play in and we were outside all the time. The classrooms were small with about eight or nine pupils. I was really enjoying being there.
16. The routine demanded that you spent the week at the school and then went home at weekends. I spent the odd weekend at the school but it was more normal to go

home as my parents lived quite close to the school. There were some boys whose parents lived abroad and they were there all the time including weekends.

17. I went into a dormitory with one other boy on the top floor his name was [REDACTED]. He was older and didn't want a young boy sharing the room with him. There were only two beds in room one where I was. The other dormitories had about three beds each and dormitory six had eight beds.

Staff

18. All the teaching staff at the school were Marist Brothers. The names I can remember being there were Brother Arthur, Brother [REDACTED] MID, Brother [REDACTED] ZMY, Brother [REDACTED] AKU, Brother David Germanus and Brother [REDACTED] MFY. There was another Brother [REDACTED] MNZ. You also had the odd Brother who would visit.

Other boys I recall at St Columba's

19. I was in most of the dormitories during my time at St Columba's. As I reached the end of my time there we were down to two working dormitories on the first floor. The boys I recall being in my dormitory in 1983 were [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] MNU, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and Aldo Moroni.

Death of Aldo Moroni

20. Aldo wasn't at the school long. I was told collectively along with the other pupils by the staff that Aldo had died. It was Brother [REDACTED] AKU who told us that Aldo's white blood cells were preventing the red blood cells from doing their job and he had passed away.. I recall that the whole school went to the funeral in Dunoon. I have had second thoughts about Aldo's death since I have spoken to another former pupil [REDACTED] MGR. [REDACTED] MGR told me that his brother [REDACTED] MGQ who had also been at St Columba's had mentioned to him that he was aware that Brother [REDACTED] AKU and one other had abused Aldo. I don't think that he ever saw it happening.

21. I fear that Aldo may have been abused physically and sexually by ^{AKU} [REDACTED] and another visiting Brother to the point where his body gave up. I don't know for sure but I suspect something untoward happened. I have no evidence of this but only learned about it in later life through my recent contact with ^{MGR} [REDACTED]. I never saw this happening and it is supposition on my behalf.

Mornings and bedtime

22. Brother Germanus usually got us up in the morning. He was the house Brother and Headmaster and was replaced as Headmaster during my time by Brother Arthur. There was a bathroom near to the dormitories. There was a bath and about sixteen sinks along with a few toilet cubicles. You would wash get changed, into school uniform and go down for breakfast.
23. After breakfast you had about fifteen minutes play time before you went to the classrooms. You had a normal school day and would go back to the main house for lunch. The evening meal was also served in the dining room.
24. There was a large living room on the ground floor where you could watch television. We didn't watch a lot of television because there were only three channels and the choice wasn't great. We spent most of our time outside playing with the other boys.
25. Bedtime did depend on how old you were but I think that we would be in bed by 9:00 pm regardless of age.

Mealtimes / Food

26. All the boys ate together in the dining room and to be fair the food was alright. You would get porridge and cereals for breakfast and if you stayed over on the weekend you would get a cooked breakfast. The Brothers working at the school had their own separate dining room. I think that there were as many as four people working in the kitchens to provide food for the boys and the staff.

27. The food was always served at the hatch between the kitchen and the dining room. You had two hot meals a day at lunch and dinner. There was no force feeding we always ate what we were given as we were growing boys.

Washing / bathing

28. I can't recall a routine for bathing but I do recall we went swimming every week and would have a shower then. We also had showers at the school.

Chores.

29. I don't recall having to do chores. You were expected to keep your bed space tidy and to clear away the dishes at mealtimes but that was about it.

Clothing / uniform

30. You had to wear a school uniform when you were at the school. It was a navy blue blazer with gold braiding, a yellow and blue striped tie, white shirt, blue sweater, black trousers and black shoes. You would wear your own clothes in the evening. The regulations relaxed about when you had to wear your uniform as the years went by.

School

31. You studied the normal subjects of English, arithmetic, maths, art and music. Sometimes the Brothers taught more than one subject and some Brothers taught only one subject. It was a good place to be as the classes were very small with less than nine to a class and it felt that more attention was being paid to you as an individual. There was more time to learn. I don't know what qualifications that the brothers had to be able to teach us. It seemed to be fine as I had nothing to really compare the standard of teaching to.

Religious education

32. On a Wednesday you had the option to go with the Brothers into town to attend a church service. On occasions a Priest would come to the school and say mass. You did say grace before meals. There was not an emphasis on religion.
33. You did have to go to an evening mass on a Sunday when you came back to the school. When you were older you would play a musical instrument or sing in the choir. You had to attend mass in your school uniform.

Trips / Holidays

34. I don't recall any trips away with the school and all the boys went home during the school holidays.

Leisure activities

35. On a Wednesday you would only be at school in the morning and then after lunch you would go swimming at the local pool in Largs. I recall that we had to digest our lunch before we went swimming. We didn't really leave the school grounds for any other activities.
36. We would also go to church events where we would play musical instruments or sing in the choir. There were also Viking festivals which we used to attend in Largs. It included things like fireworks displays.
37. When you were a bit older you were allowed to bring your bike to the school and you could cycle about in the grounds. I can't remember having any personal possessions with me. There was a golf course at the edge of the grounds and we used to look for golf balls. There were board games and it was the start of some of the very early computer games that we were also able to play.

38. I recall that you would have an 'extra's account' for any expenses that you incurred while you were at the school. I seem to remember seeing a bill and there was charges on it for things like laundry. I don't recall any pocket money.

Birthdays and Christmas

39. I was always at home for Christmas and I don't know whether birthdays were celebrated as I have no memory of that.

Visits / Inspections/ Review of Detention

40. Some of the boys were at the school and had very few visits as their family lived too far away or were serving with the forces abroad. I used to get visits from my godmother who lived in Largs and I also recall my mother calling and taking me out.

Healthcare

41. If one of the boys was ill his parents would be called and told. I think that the local doctor would be called if he was needed. I did fall out of a tree on one occasion and injured my arm, chest and legs. I was only badly bruised but it was four days before my confirmation and I can recall the pain walking in the church towards the altar. I think that the local doctor was called out to see me but I didn't require to be hospitalised. I can't recall the name of the Doctor but I knew he worked locally.

Discipline

42. I do recall that some of the teachers raised their voices at some of the boys. I can't speak for this myself because I never stepped out of line. I think there was a school belt but I never saw it being used.

Running away

43. I only ran away on one occasion after Brother ^{MNZ} tried to sexually assault me in the showers. I managed to get home. I did tell my parents what was happening but they took me back the next day. That was in late 1982 or early 1983.

Abuse at St Columba's College, Largs.

44. The abuse that I suffered at St Columba's College was at the hands of Brother ^{AKU} ^{AKU} was a housemaster at the school. He was there for a while and then left again. ^{AKU} I can't remember him not being there. ^{AKU} wasn't there when I first arrived but arrived shortly after I was about eight years of age. That is when the abuse started.
45. It started when I was invited to ^{AKU} room which was near the dormitories. He would get treats and soft drinks from the store downstairs and give them to me. He started to encourage me to touch him. It then became masturbation and I would have to put my finger in his anus. He would also touch me. I don't think that I was subjected to penetrative sex but on one occasion I did feel pressure on my anus and I am unsure if he was trying to penetrate me. Usually he just wanted me to masturbate him until he ejaculated. On two occasions he tried to put his penis in my mouth but I didn't like the taste and refused to do it.
46. I was only wearing my pyjamas when I went to his room and so I was naked very easily. It usually happened at night time when all the boys were in bed. Sometimes he was naked and sometimes he was partially clothed.
47. This went on until I left the school and happened about twice a week. This person was in a position of authority and so I did what I was told. I had no other life experience so I had nothing to compare it to. I think that I normalised this behaviour.

48. There were occasions when the other boys went swimming and I would be kept back with one or two of the other boys. Sometimes it was MGR or MNU and myself. Brother AKU would make us get into the bath together and he would encourage us to touch each other's private parts while he watched. He would be getting aroused by handling his own genitalia.
49. When AKU became the housemaster on the first floor room I was also in a dormitory on that floor and the abuse continued. I was only ever on my own with him. This abuse continued for about four years until Brother AKU left the school in 1982.
50. When Brother AKU left St Columba's I witnessed Brother MNZ trying to touch up boys in the shower area. He made an attempt to touch me but I managed to get against the far wall of the shower so he left me alone. This started me realising that something was not right. It caused me to run away from the school. I am not sure of Brother MNZ surname. The only boy I can remember this happening to was [REDACTED]. All the boys involved in the incident were about eleven years old. It was a one off incident.
51. I do recall one occasion when Brother AKU called at my parents' pub in [REDACTED]. Although nothing happened to me in the time he spent during that visit I am not sure what his reason was to be there. He was well known to my parents who knew him from the school. I am not sure what the purpose of the visit was.
52. I would estimate that when I was at St Columba's Brother AKU would be in his late 20s. He was an adult so it is hard to put an age on him because I was a young child. He was a heavy set man with a beard and wore glasses. Brother MNZ was mid to late 30s but I don't know his surname.

Reporting of abuse at St Columba's College, Largs

53. When I ran away after Brother ^{MNZ} tried to touch me in the showers I finally told my parents what had been happening to me and what Brother ^{AKU} had been doing to me. I think that it must have been a Monday as my father was out with his friends having a drink. When they tracked him down he came home and there was a huge argument between my mother, father and my grandmother. My parents didn't believe what I was telling them as Marist Monks did not behave like that and so the next morning I was taken back to the school. Brother ^{AKU} had left by that time but Brother ^{MNZ} was still there.
54. My father asked me if what I was telling him about the abuse was true. I think that my father had said that he would deal with the matter but I don't think that anything else was said or done. I think that Brother Arthur spoke to my both my parents who had brought me back to St Columba's. He allayed all their concerns which seemed to finish the matter. There was a lot of Catholic guilt and the church could do no wrong in the eyes of my mother and grandmother.
55. We never discussed what was happening amongst the other boys. It was just never talked about. I didn't know any better and none of the other boys wanted to share their experiences.

Leaving St Columba's College, Largs in 1983

56. I left school in the [REDACTED] of 1983. The education was finished and although I was leaving my school friends from St Columba's I was going back to attend [REDACTED] with my other circle of friends. The rumour was that St Columba's were closing anyway. I had completed my primary school education and needed to go to a secondary school.

Life after being in care

57. My parents split up just after I left St Columba's. My mother moved in with her new partner in [REDACTED] and my gran continued to live in [REDACTED]. I lived between these houses. My father went down south to London to work as a chef.
58. I finished at school although I was not very academic. I went down to London to stay with my father and to train as a chef. I started on an apprentice scheme. I also worked "on the side" to make extra money for which I was paid cash. I had a habit of going home every month and blowing all my money on the night life in [REDACTED] which was very good.
59. I returned to Scotland after a year and managed to get a bursary to go to college to continue studying. I was also returning to London to do functions. I travelled all over England and Ireland working as a chef. I also worked on the cruise ships and stayed in South Africa.
60. I married and in 2008 my wife gave birth to our daughter [REDACTED] in 2011. My wife and I split up in 2012 although we shared a house together for two years. I was getting a reputation as a chef and was travelling all over to work which had put a strain on our marriage.
61. I finally met my older half-sister when I went to my gran's funeral. I also met her at my mother's funeral. She lives in Lanarkshire. My younger sister was living in Spain with my father but I had very little contact with them as my younger sister had mental health problems.
62. My young sister called me one day last year to say that she couldn't cope with my father any more. I arranged for him to come and stay with me but after being there for ten days my father passed away.

63. 2018 was a very bad year as both my parents passed away. I lost my job. I found out that my fiancé was cheating on me [REDACTED]
64. It was my former classmate from St Columba's who had been there at the same time as me ^{MGR} [REDACTED] who encouraged me to contact The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and give my evidence.

Impact

65. In 2006 and I was sitting watching television in my house when an article came on the news about the Marist Brothers. It caused me to feel really angry and I had to phone my father in Spain to vent my anger. He had been already been told on the occasion that I ran away from St Columba's what had happened. He had done nothing about it at the time. After that episode I managed to stop thinking about it again for a number of years.
66. I am a very pragmatic person and deal with things rationally. When I go into a kitchen to prepare food I can block out everything and enter my own world. When I first started in kitchens I was worried about the kitchen life taking over my life. I had to try and separate these things but I wanted to be good at my job.
67. I was with my father when he died. I had to make all the funeral arrangements. My fiancé was all worried that I would blow up and that I wasn't reacting normally to my father's death. Her behaviour was strange and it was then I realised that something was not right with our relationship. I continued to work hard in the kitchen where I felt normal.
68. I have a very good relationship with my ex-wife and my daughter. I see my daughter once a week. I have been working hard to clear debts that I incurred when I was not working. [REDACTED]

69. Again I am not sure how the abuse that happened to me has affected my life because I have nothing to compare it to. I have not sought out any professional help like counselling as I have managed to lock away the experiences myself. I think that when I ran away from St Columba's I managed to get some control back in my life.

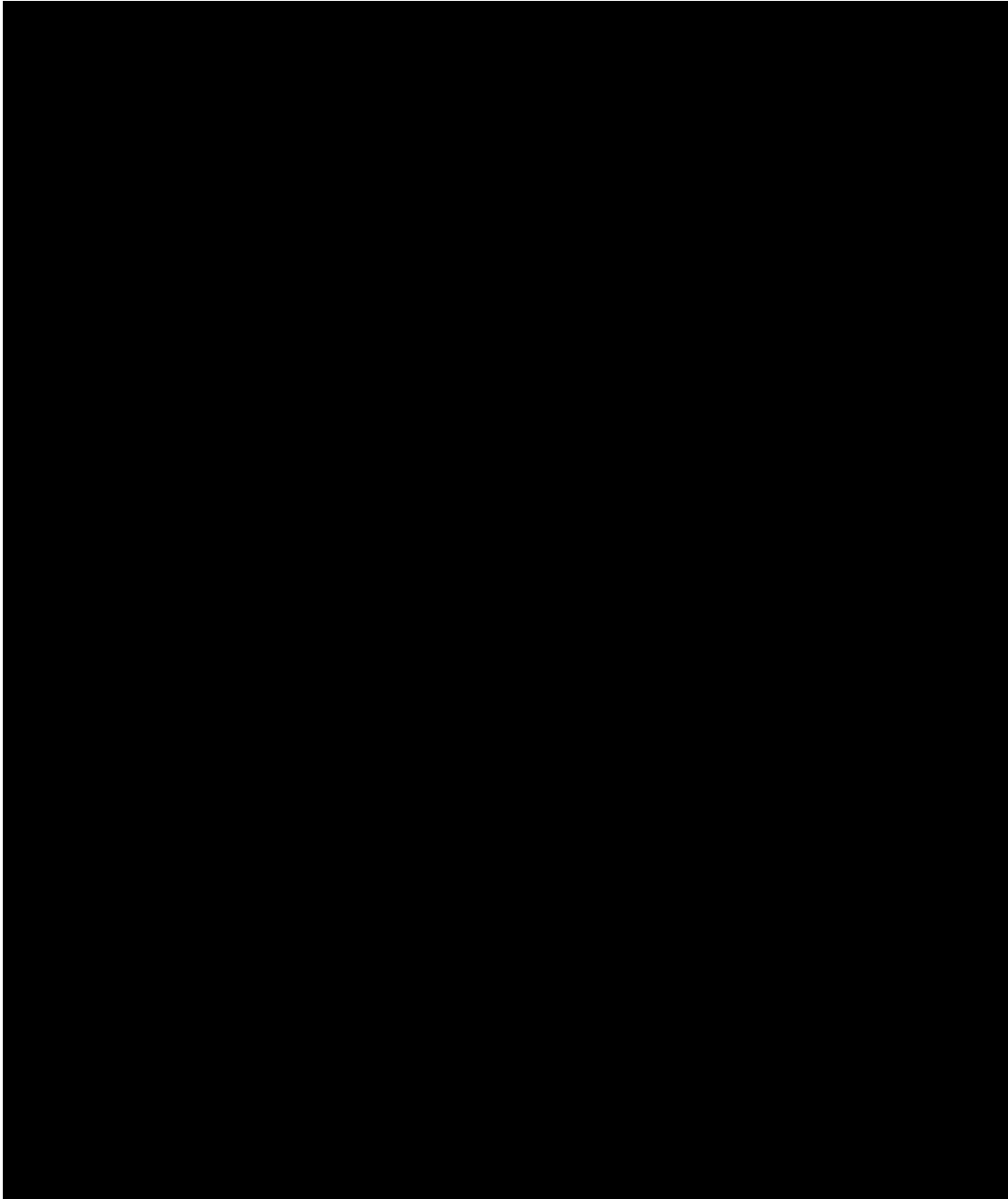
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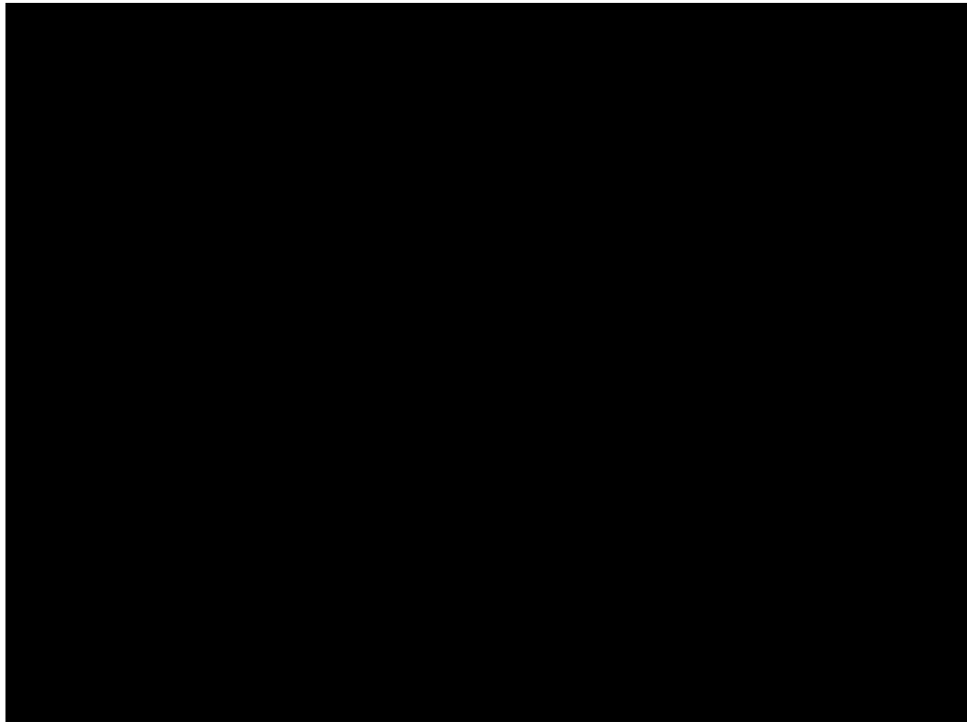
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Records

77. I have never tried to get my records from my time at St Columba's as I didn't know that they existed. The only records I have seen was an in-house ledger which detailed the boys that had run away. [REDACTED] I remember smiling when I read the contents recalling the time I ran away.

Lessons to be learned

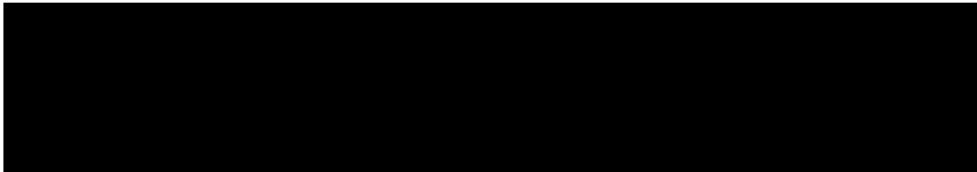
78. I would hope that this Inquiry will ensure prevention and tighter controls. There should be more regular checks and assessments of people working with children. I think that it is accepted that everyone is capable of killing someone. Is it right then to assume that people working with children are all capable of committing abuse?

79. How do the abusers of children not realise what they are doing is wrong. I know that this is left field thinking but the questions I have are: Is everyone capable of abuse and was my abuser himself abused?

Other information

80. In later life I have learned that in the early days St Columba's had first been used as a retreat for Marist Brothers who had problems. I think from that they decided to make the place into a school to earn some money and keep it functioning. My own view is that there were Brothers with problems who were residing there when the premises were operating as a school. I think that Brother Arthur and Brother MFY MFY were there to counsel some of the other Brothers.

81.



82. 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.

MGS
A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the witness.

Signed.....

Dated..... 20/5/2019