

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

GDN
[REDACTED]

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is GDN [REDACTED] though I have always been known as GDN [REDACTED] and my confirmation name was given as GDN [REDACTED]. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1953. My details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in the Gorbals area of Glasgow and my parents were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My father was from an Italian background while my mother was Spanish and spoke little English. I had eight siblings and, from the oldest to the youngest, we were [REDACTED], [REDACTED], Me, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. There was roughly a year between each of us.
3. After my dad came out of the army he worked as a landscape gardener. He met my mother when he was serving in Gibraltar. They were both Catholics. It was my father who apparently insisted on calling me GDN [REDACTED] but my mother hated the name which is why I've always been known as GDN [REDACTED] and is the name I have always preferred.
4. My early life was alright and the family moved to Maryhill in the north of Glasgow and I went to Our Lady of Assumption school which I hated. There was no specific reason why I hated school, I just didn't like being there and got expelled at the age of ten for assaulting the [REDACTED] who was called Mrs [REDACTED]. I was considered unruly but the only reason I assaulted her when she started to assault me across the legs with a belt. She was going crazy.

5. What had happened was that I had been told by the best fighter in the school that he was going to batter me so I set about him and that was why we were going to get the belt. He wanted to attack me because I wasn't originally from the area which was Maryhill and the gang culture of the time meant it could be dangerous being in another area.
6. I remember going to Glasgow Sheriff Court but the charges against me were dropped after my lawyer counter-charged [REDACTED] for assaulting me with the belt. Despite these charges being dropped I was still sent to remand school which I think had something to do with me allegedly stealing an old rusty hammer. I was first sent to the assessment centre at Larchgrove. It was a sign of the times that they sent you to these places for next to no reason.

Larchgrove

7. When I arrived at Larchgrove I was only a wee eleven year old boy I was in a place with dormitories with about fifteen boys in each. One of the first things that happened was that we got our hair cut short and I was told to behave myself. I don't recall who ran Larchgrove and I don't remember any of the staff there.
8. Larchgrove was a place they sent you to while they decided where to send you on a more long-term basis. It was all boys who were aged between about eleven and fifteen. I don't think we were split up by age or anything like that.

Routine at Larchgrove

9. I really don't recall much about the general routine in Larchgrove. I was only there for a short time.

Mealtimes / Food

10. We ate round a big table and all I recall was that the food was horrible and I have particularly bad memories of the potatoes, cabbage and sausages. As a young boy I

was always hungry. I had been used to my dad's cooking mainly Italian food which was very good, as was my mum's. In Larchgrove you got whacked across the head or punched on the face by a member of staff if you didn't eat things.

11. I hated carrots and they would push my face into the plate and call me a bastard for not eating them. However, the way I looked at it was that my dad was a hard man and a fighter and I had been used to him punching me so, in my view, nobody could physically hurt me the way he had.

Washing / bathing

12. I think we had showers at Larchgrove. They might have had baths but I don't remember them.

Abuse at Larchgrove

13. It's really only the bad things I remember. These places were made to break you. They would tell you to act by the rules and that you couldn't act the way you did outside. Really my memory of Larchgrove is sketchy and I just recall the punches and kicks you received from the staff if you stepped out of line.

Leaving Larchgrove

14. I was collected in a mini-bus and taken to St Joseph's in Tranent. I hadn't received any notice that I was going though I always knew I would be going there because of my age and they had only been waiting for a vacancy to come up before sending me there. There were no children's hearings or anything like that before I was transferred.

St Joseph's, Tranent

15. St Joseph's was out in the wilds and was an old mansion with several floors. It was run by the De La Salle Brothers and was all boys between eleven and fourteen. I recall it was always cold and we always wore corduroy shorts. We were split into four houses

two of which were De La Salle and St Joseph's all in one building with another separate building for those preparing to leave. I was in St Joseph's House.

16. There was a big yard and the place had small dorms and a chapel which we sometimes went to at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. This could happen at any time if the Brothers were displeased. We would be in our pyjamas and bare foot. The floor was made of cobble stone and was freezing and they would have us there singing hymns. We'd go back to our beds after it and be knackered in the morning. The first time it happened I thought "What's going on here?" but it became the norm.
17. The Brothers lived in the same building as us but were apart from us. The ones I recall were Brothers ^{GWM} [REDACTED], ^{MJJ} [REDACTED] and ^{GY} [REDACTED] who was a big Irish man who use to whack you over the head. I think ^{SNR} [REDACTED] was Brother ^{GYZ} [REDACTED] who I believe was later given two years for abusing boys. I later read he died in a car crash. They all loved their drink, especially on De La Salle day.

Routine at St Joseph's, Tranent

18. We got up at 6:00 am when we were woken by a bell. We would then get washed, dressed and go for breakfast in the dining hall. After that we would go for a walk around Tranent walking in lines with the Brothers which was to keep us fit. After the walk we would have a wash or a shower then have some classes which took us up to lunchtime.
19. In the afternoon it was back to school which was within the building. I don't recall what we did after school, which was about 3:00 or 4:00 pm, but it's likely that we went for another walk. We also went to chapel either in the afternoon or in the evening. Bedtime was about 8:00 pm and we all went to bed at the same time.
20. At the weekends we went on more walks. We didn't go to school. We never really had any free time to ourselves, the Brothers were always in control. They would sometimes let us play in the yard but as often as not it was too cold, especially since we were wearing short trousers.

Chores

21. You would have to scrub the floors and clean the dorms. You also had to make your bed in a specific way and if you did it wrong you would get a slap and they would pull your bed apart and tell you to do it again. Some of the boys also worked in the kitchen and cleaned the dining room.

Health

22. There was a matron who I would say was in her late fifties with white hair and wore glasses. She would give you an aspirin or even stitch cuts. If you had flu or something like that they wouldn't let you stay in bed. They would just tell us to walk it off. I don't ever recall seeing a doctor or a dentist. If you went to the matron as a result of injuries you got from the Brothers, and told her how you got the injuries, she wouldn't believe you and would tell the Brothers what you had said.

School

23. I think the teacher was an old woman maybe in her fifties with grey hair and glasses. I don't recall ever learning anything and to this day my spelling isn't good. Some of the other boys did learn but I wasn't interested and those of us who were like that were left to our own devices. We were in classes according to our age.

Christmas/birthdays

24. I think we went home for Christmas but if anything special was done for it then I have no recollection of it. Maybe you got an apple or orange for Christmas. Birthdays weren't celebrated, you didn't get any presents or even a card. My dad says he and mum did send me cards but I never saw them.

Clothes

25. They gave you the uniform to wear and each house had its own colour, my jerkin was red. We also wore corduroy shorts all the time with long socks.

Possessions

26. We didn't have possessions of our own and we didn't receive any pocket money. We didn't have toys or books or access to a TV. You couldn't bring anything back from home as you were there to be punished. One boy brought back a radio and it was taken from him and he got a slap for it.

Trips

27. The Brothers used to take us to Forfar to pick berries in late summer and while there we would stay in camp beds in big huts. One good thing about that was that they gave us Forfar bridies. I know that the Brothers received money for all the work we did but we never saw any of the money.

Religion

28. We would go to chapel every day and sometimes in the middle of the night. We would also be forced to go to confession. I don't recall the priest's name. Some of the boys were altar boys but they tended to be the pets, the Brother's favourites.

Home visits

29. I think we got home once a month for the weekend. If you had been in trouble, you would lose that privilege. If you didn't go home you just went on the usual long walks. Privileges could be taken away for any daft reason like talking in line or looking at the Brothers in the wrong way.

Visits/visitors

30. My dad came to visit me once and took me out for the day in Edinburgh. My dad had just shown up out of the blue and at first Brother ^{GYZ} [REDACTED] wasn't going to let me out because he could smell drink from my dad but my dad said he would smash the place up if they didn't let me go with him for the day. Afterwards the Brothers said that that would never happen again.
31. No social workers ever came to check up on me and I don't recall any official visitors. It was as if I lived in a world within a world cut off from everybody else.

Correspondence

32. I didn't receive any letters from home and there was no point in me sending letters home as the Brothers censored any letters that any of us would send. This meant that if any boy complained about a specific Brother in a letter he would end up in big trouble so nobody did. I don't ever recall using a phone to call home.

Running away

33. I ran away once from St Joseph's. Myself and another boy were going to get the bus to Buchanan St to get the bus back to St Joseph's but, instead, we went to his mum's house in Govan but she wouldn't let me in. I went back home but my dad said he would have to take me back as he would go to jail if he didn't.
34. I was about twelve years old when that happened and when I got back I got a beating from, I think, Brothers ^{GWM} [REDACTED] and ^{MJJ} [REDACTED] punching and kicking me. They said that if I ran away again they would murder me and just tell everybody I had run away. the Brothers telling us we would be murdered was a regular threat.

Bed wetting

35. Bed wetting was never a problem for me. Those who did wet the bed got dragged out of their beds and thrown in to a shower and had their beds ripped apart. In our dorm it was Brother ^{GWM} who was in charge and it was he who would do that to the boys in our dorm that wet their beds.

Abuse at St Joseph's Tranent

36. The attitude of the Brothers at St Joseph's was to break you, not rehabilitate. It was a place that left you feeling bitter when you came out of it. It was to hammer you into the ground. There was a boy there called [REDACTED] who was a grass. I had been in the place about six months and I told him I was going to give him a slap and Brother ^{GWM} overheard me.
37. Brother ^{GWM} then started punching me and battering lumps out of me. I ran under a table-tennis table and he grabbed a wooden scrubbing brush then started battering me with that until he was exhausted. I was holding onto the table leg and I genuinely thought he was going to kill me. It was a terrifying experience. I was left badly bruised because of it.
38. Brother ^{GWM} was the most sadistic of the Brothers and I saw him batter a lot of the boys. He would grab us by the hair and punch us. He would punch you on the head or in the face simply because he was in a bad mood. He used to also pick you up by the sideburns which was agony. That was one of the big problems with some of the Brothers, their behaviour was unpredictable.
39. After the incident under the table-tennis table, I was at home that weekend and my parents saw all the bruises. They asked me what had happened but I just told them I had been in a fight because I knew my dad would have gone to the school and ended up in jail for assaulting Brother ^{GWM}.

40. I did eventually tell my dad about how Brother ^{GWM} had slapped me about the head. On the Sunday my dad took me to Buchanan St to get the bus back to St Joseph's which was being driven by Brother ^{GWM}. My dad slapped him and warned him about further assaulting me.
41. After that things got worse for me. Brother ^{GWM} came from the Gorbals, at least he said he did, and he tended to take his temper out on me because I told him I also came from the Gorbals. He assaulted me on a regular basis throughout my time in St Joseph's both by punching and kicking me. He just regularly battered me.
42. There was one incident that happened during the day when Brother ^{GWM} got me into a room on the pretence of saying sorry to me for the incident with the brush handle. It might have happened in the cobbler's shop where Brother ^{GWM} worked. In the room at the time was also Brother ^{GY} the big Irish Brother.
43. The two Brothers grabbed me and Brother ^{GWM} stripped me. I tried to fight them off but there were two of them and they were too strong for me, I was only a kid. Without going in to details the two of them then sexually assaulted me, they raped me. I'm sure the two of them were turned on by it.
44. That incident stayed with me all my life and has caused me to have nightmares, night terrors, as a result of it. The only other person I ever told about it was my wife who would hear me screaming in my sleep. It used to make me doubt my own sexuality though I have never been a homosexual.
45. I always thought that, while I am sure they sexually assaulted me for their own pleasure, it was also just another way they had of trying to break me. After it Brother ^{GWM} told me that if I ever told my dad about it I would be killed and my body would just disappear and that there were many bodies in the field.
46. I know that some of the Brothers would take some of the boys that grassed, their "yes" men, from their beds and down to where the Brothers lived and rape them. The rest

of us could hear those boys crying. We knew this because the boys would come back to the dorm crying and we would ask what was wrong.

47. Most wouldn't say but one boy did eventually say that the Brothers had raped him. I don't remember that boy's name. The Brothers I recall seeing taking boys from their beds were Brothers ^{GWM} and ^{MJJ} and ^{GY}.
48. Brother ^{MJJ} was a crazy man and would often just punch you on the face for no reason. The weird thing was that he would try and be nice to you and then batter you. He was unpredictable. He was like that with all the boys.
49. I believed them when they said that they would kill us because sometimes a boy would suddenly just not be there and when we asked where they were the Brothers would just tell us that they had run away. We didn't believe that because people would have told us if they were thinking about running away.

Leaving St Joseph's Tranent

50. I was fourteen when I left St Joseph's. I recall that they gave me a new blue suit, a shirt and new shoes. I left simply because I had reached my release date. I went in a mini-bus to the train station where they put you on a train and that was it, I was out. Before I left I remember Brother ^{GYZ} told me that that was me in the big world but, if anything happened, that they could bring me back any time they wanted.

Life after being in care

51. I went to St Columba's High School. I hated it and used to get into a lot of trouble and they were going to send me back to St Joseph's but Brother ^{GYZ} at least I think it was him, came out to see me. He said "you don't want to go back there. They'll kill you. I'll fight to keep you out of there". He was talking about St Joseph's and the Brothers who worked there. I was only in school for a few months before I left with no qualifications.

52. I worked in [REDACTED] Bakery for about a year and then moved to Coventry when I was sixteen. I worked in fibre glass insulation for about six months. After that I spent most of my life in and out of prison up until 1989 when I got out after a long stretch. I didn't work after I got out of prison. My wife and I married in 1975 and we have three daughters.

Impact

53. I get night terrors. My time in care lead to me having almost no education. It destroyed my life and I struggled psychologically. I admit that I rebelled but I had to do that to survive. That's what lead me to a life of being in and out of prison. I was never a thief but I was always angry and if I was ever threatened I would react. I feel that if I had not been in those institutions my life would have been so much better.
54. I've had depression and anxiety, especially after coming out of prison, but I was only ever given tablets for them. My time in care has never left me and it's constantly on my mind, especially at night.

Counselling

55. My GP did send me for counselling but I was never able to bring myself to tell them about my time in remand schools. I have contemplated suicide because I just wanted to get these things out of my mind.
56. I once broke down in front of my doctor and that night a psychiatrist and a nurse came out to my house. They thought I was suffering from PTSD and put me on tablets.

Reporting of Abuse

57. I have never reported what happened to me in St Joseph's to anybody. It's not something you want to talk about, especially about being sexually abused.

Records

58. I have never tried to get my records. I always assumed whoever was in charge of them wouldn't give them to me but I would definitely be interested in getting hold of them to find out why I was in the places that I was sent to.

Lessons to be Learned

59. Somebody should be held to account. Such places should never have been allowed to exist. I am only one of many who suffered abuse at their hands and all those who suffered should get a chance to tell people what happened. This is the first time I have spoken about it but there must be others who had harder times than me who have never spoken of the abuse they suffered. I think that's because they don't think people will believe them.
60. That's why I'm glad that this Inquiry is taking place. It has taken a long time but at last people are listening to us. I'm just glad to get the chance to speak to people who are willing to listen to me. I'm lucky that I had a mum and dad but some were orphans and didn't have any means of support.
61. I know the Pope has made an apology but it still goes on. These people were supposed to be men of God but to me they were just beasts. I stopped going to church long ago as a result of what these people did to me and others.
62. People looking after children should be vetted more. Their backgrounds should be thoroughly checked and inspections of such places should be carried out regularly. I would even suggest that hidden cameras wouldn't be out of order in such places. Anything that helps keep children safe should be considered.

Hopes for the Inquiry

63. I am just glad that the Inquiry is giving people the chance to speak about their experiences and the awful things that happened to them. It is important that such

people are given that opportunity. I was lucky that I had a mum and dad but many others didn't.

64. 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..... 15th Nov 2019