

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

HOB

Support person present No

1. My name is HOB. My date of birth is 1964. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. My maiden surname was HOB which changed to HOB when I got married in 1989.

Life before going into care

2. I lived with my mum and dad in Perth. My mum is and my dad is . They are both still alive. They divorced when I was five years old. Although they divorced, my dad would still regularly come to the house. He didn't live with us but he still bullied my mum. Sometimes he slapped her and regularly insulted her. He would just walk into the house and expect to be fed. My mum was a good mum and she worked hard. She was a lovely woman and she still is. My dad had an affair with my mum's niece , and ended up moving in with her. They have since married and have five children.
3. I was brought up with my sister and two brothers. was five years older than me, then there were my two brothers and . I was the youngest child. There were two other children before me but they passed away.
4. After my dad left, I shared a bedroom with my mum. had her own room and my brothers shared a room. It wasn't easy living at home. My dad was a bully towards my mum and she was always scared of him. He was a mechanic and my brother worked for him at his garage. One time, when I was about nine, I went to my

dad and asked him what I was getting as a Christmas present. He told me to hold my hand out and he spat on it. He was a nasty man. My dad sexually abused me, and I have since found out that he sexually abused my sisters. My sister [REDACTED] has told me that she does not want dragged into making any statement to anyone about it. My grandfather, my dad's dad, used to sexually abuse me too. My grandfather was married to my mum's sister.

5. I never said anything to my mum about what my dad was doing to me. I knew it would upset her and be too much for her. I told one of my mum's friends that my dad was abusing me. I don't think she believed me and just told me it was maybe in my imagination. She never really did anything to help me, but she had her own family issues.
6. My brother [REDACTED] used to hit me, and he used to get hit by my dad. It was more than brotherly fights. Once he kicked me down a set of stairs. In some ways he was quite good but generally he was a violent, violent person. My brother [REDACTED] was different. He was very laid back and eventually stood up for me and told [REDACTED] to leave me alone.
7. I remember at some point my mum fell ill. My brothers were taken to live in temporary care with another family. This was arranged by the social work department. [REDACTED] went to stay with another family. I think I went to stay with my dad and [REDACTED]. I think my mum was getting surgery and we were only away for a few weeks.
8. I went to Goodlyburn Primary School then Newlands Academy in Perth. Before I was ever in a home, probably about eleven years old, I remember walking in to the social work offices in Balhousie Street, Perth. The first couple of times I told them I wanted to speak to someone but they just told me to go home. The last time I went in I told them I wanted to be taken into care. My friend who had been at primary school with me was in a home because she didn't go to school. She seemed to be getting on really well in the home. I went in and asked them to put me into a home. I think they got fed up with me going into their office.

9. That was where I first met Cath Coutts, she was a social worker. I didn't tell her then about the abuse from my father. I just told her that I didn't want to go to school. She told me that if I didn't go to school I would end up going to a children's panel and that it could affect my mum. I didn't want that so I started going to school. I wasn't happy at school and I was getting bullied. Because of the bullying I stopped going again and refused to go.
10. I would have still been at primary school and it was before I was taken into care I remember going to see my doctor. It was Doctor Samuel Hewitt at the Green Practice in Perth who I saw. I remember telling him that I was going to the social work department because I wanted taken into care. I told him that my dad had sexually abused me and that my grandfather had sexually abused me. I cannot remember what his reaction was or what he said.
11. Cath Coutts came round a few times to try and encourage me to go to school but I refused. I eventually went to a children's panel and they talked about me going into a home. I was getting bullied at school, and there was violence from my brother at home. The abuse from my dad had stopped by then. I just wanted out of there. At the panel they asked me if I wanted to go into a home and I told them that I did and they agreed. I had told Cath Coutts about what was going on with my dad but I didn't tell the panel. I went back home for a few days and got a chance to say goodbye to most of my friends. I knew I was going to Dundee.

Life in Ryehill House, Dundee

12. Cath Coutts the social worker came to my house and picked me and my mum up and drove us to Ryehill School. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

13.

14.

15.

16.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

17.

18.

19.

20.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

21.

22.

23.

24.

25.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

26.

27.

28.

29.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

30.

31.

32.

33.

Leaving Ryehill House

34. It was definitely [REDACTED] when I went into Ryehill. I am sure it was [REDACTED]. I think the [REDACTED] had just started when I got thrown out. Secondary Institutions - to

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

[REDACTED] had packed up all my stuff and Cath Coutts took me away. We went back to the social work office in Perth and that's where Cath Coutts told me just to go home. She said she had nowhere else for me to go to. Cath already knew that my dad had sexually abused me but he no longer lived with us. I had to walk home, on my own with my box of belongings. It was maybe three-quarters of a mile away. I think Cath Coutts was fed up with me and I can't blame her.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

35.

36.

Life back home with mum

37. I walked home and turned up at my mum's door. I was there for the whole of the [REDACTED]. Life back at home was okay. [REDACTED], my brother, wasn't too bad with me. A couple of times Cath Coutts came to the house and she took me out for a while. We discussed things but I never told her again about the sexual abuse by my father because I had already told her. I think she knew that things were better at home but I still wanted out of my home. Towards the end of the [REDACTED] Cath Coutts came to the house to visit me. She told me that she had found a place for me at Balnacraig. I was quite happy to be going there. I would have been going into third year at school, so I was about fourteen.
38. Cath Coutts subsequently came and picked me and my mum up and drove us to Balnacraig. I will always remember that day because when we arrived, my mum accidentally shut the car door on my fingers. I had to go straight in to the medical centre in Balnacraig to get my fingers taped up. I left my mum and Cath Coutts speaking to Mr ^{SGQ} [REDACTED] and Mr ^{GHG} [REDACTED]. It was very quiet because there were very few other girls there as it was still the [REDACTED]. They introduced themselves and I was shown around the school. They interviewed me and I was asked what I thought about staying there. I told them that I liked it because I thought it looked amazing.

Balnacraig List D School, Perth

39. Balnacraig was a lovely old house that I had been told had been renovated. I was in Balnacraig for about two years. Upstairs were dorms A and B and there were other smaller rooms too. I was in a dorm first then I moved to a room. Each room had two to four beds in each. It was all girls in there and the age range was from about nine up to sixteen. There were probably 24 girls in total. The beds had duvets and covers. I had never had a duvet before. I had my own wardrobe where I stored my stuff. There was a recreation area with a wooden floor. At one end was a massive bay window.

40. Mr ^{SGQ} was ^{SNR}. His wife worked there too. Mr ^{GHG} was ^{SNR}. Other staff in there were Ma McDonald and Ma McLeod.

Routine at Balnacraig

First day

41. It was probably just a few weeks after my visit that I actually went in to Balnacraig. I think I went by taxi. My friend came with me and my mum.

Mornings and bedtime

42. In the morning staff would chap our doors and wake us up. We would get washed, get dressed then go downstairs for breakfast. After breakfast we would all go into the recreation room and sit on the chairs around the room. The teachers and night shift care staff would come in and we would have a meeting. ^{SNR} would be Mr ^{SGQ} or it would be Mr ^{GHG}. This happened every morning. They just really discussed if there had been any incidents the previous day or night, and if there was anything happening that day. We then went to our school classes. After school there was a similar meeting like the one that took place in the morning. We usually discussed what activities were taking place that evening. Grievances were also discussed and boxing fights were arranged between the girls if anyone had been fighting that day.

Food

43. We all had our own seats in the dining room. When you went in for breakfast you had to stand behind the seat at your place. When the teachers came in we were allowed to sit down. Tea and toast was brought to the table and we only had to leave the table to get our choice of cereal. We went back there for our lunch during school. The food was really good at Balnacraig. If you didn't like any particular food you just

didn't eat it. You might get asked why you didn't eat it but you were never forced to eat food. We always had fish on a Friday.

Washing and bathing

44. We had individual wash rooms to get washed. There were a row of toilets in there too. We could wash and shower when we wanted. We were allowed to shut the door there.

Chores / pocket money

45. We made our own beds in the morning and tidied up our area. After breakfast we had a list of duties to do in a rota. We got pocket money and I tried to save some when I was there. I could ask for some money if I was going out for the evening but they wouldn't give me very much.

Clothing

46. I took some clothes in with me from home. Two members of staff, either Ma McLeod or Ma McDonald would take you to the shops to buy new clothes. At Balnacraig I got an allowance so that was used to buy me clothes.

Leisure / recreation

47. In the recreation room there was a television and I spent a lot of time in there. There were books and games for us to play with. We did other activities too. We had organised sword fighting, and we would sometimes play rounders outside. There was more emphasis on activities than there was on education. I was allowed out of Balnacraig provided I had been good. I had to get permission and I usually asked for that when we were at the meeting with Mr ^{SGQ} in the evening.
48. A game we used to play was called murder-ball. The girls would get split into two teams in the recreation room. The aim of the game was to get the ball, which started

in the middle of the room, into the other team's corner. It was a brutal game. God forbid if there was a girl in the other team who hated you. We used to beat the crap out of each other. It was a bit like rugby but there were no rules. Mr ^{SGQ} and Mr ^{GHG} both liked this game.

School

49. The schooling was within Balnacraig. The teachers came in from outside so were only there during the day. We were in buildings like blocks outside the main building. I don't think the teaching was very good. One of the teachers was Mr Roy. We had different teachers for each subject. Girls who did exams had to go outside to a college or somewhere like that to sit them. I never sat any exams.
50. If a teacher was off sick then Mr ^{SGQ} would fill in. His idea of filling in would be to make us play murder-ball, sword fencing or gymnastics

Holidays

51. We got taken away on holiday, and went to Kinloch Rannoch. The staff came with us. We had a good time.

Birthdays and Christmas

52. We celebrated Christmas and birthdays at Balnacraig. It was lovely. The cook would make a birthday cake and I got a present. At Christmas we all got Christmas presents to take home. There was one girl, [REDACTED] who had no family to go to during the holidays. I asked if she could come home with me. It was apparently taken to a board meeting and it was agreed that she could. She stayed with us over the holiday period and some other times and then actually came to live with us for a while. As far as I am aware no-one ever came to the house or checked to see that this was a suitable arrangement.

Visits/Inspections

53. I regularly went out of Balnacraig to go and see my mum. She would come to Balnacraig if there was something on, like if we were performing a show. She didn't come otherwise, because I went to see her. I remember someone coming in to psychiatrically assess me. I think they were just trying to get inside my head. It only lasted about half an hour. All the girls were seen by the psychiatrist.
54. I remember Cath Coutts came to see me not long after I had arrived at Balnacraig. We had a chat and I told her things were much better than Ryehill. I think the only other time I saw Cath Coutts was when there was a review. I think that was after about a year. I did see her a few other times but not very often.

Discipline

55. If you were bad or did something to get punished you would be made to do the dishes which meant someone else on the cleaning rota would get off with doing it. Sometimes you would get fined. If ever I was late home, had been fighting, or rude to staff, I would get fined.
56. If you were really bad at Balnacraig you got put on, what was called, "sanitary squad". I once had a fight with a girl called [REDACTED] and I threw her across the room. She got stuck behind a radiator which was switched on and she couldn't get out. I got put on sanitary squad for that. When you were on sanitary squad you were called a "scrubber" and a "torag". Mr ^{SGQ}[REDACTED] might call for two torags to go to his room to clear away his dirty dishes. When you were in there he would just insult you and make a fool out of you. Sometimes he would quite often just ignore you too. You might have to do all the tea dishes too.
57. Another girl, [REDACTED], once attacked me in the sewing room with a knitting needle. She got me down on the floor and was holding the needle above me. I managed to get her hand away from me. The sewing teacher ran to get Mr ^{SGQ}[REDACTED] and by that time I had got [REDACTED] off me but [REDACTED] put her hand up my skirt and grabbed

my thigh. I banged her head off the floor and she had to go to hospital with concussion. I got put on sanitary squad for that. I had a big bruise on my leg where she grabbed me and I showed Mr SGQ [REDACTED] it but it made no difference. I was on sanitary squad for a few days.

58. You would be made to wear blue overalls and your own clothes would be taken from you especially if you were a runaway. You would maybe have a petticoat and a pair of sandals too. You had to go to school classes wearing this. I wasn't allowed to go out when I was on sanitary squad and pocket money was stopped.

Abuse at Balnacraig

59. I liked Balnacraig although sometimes it was a bit of a nightmare living with 24 other girls. The only thing that I really think was bad about Balnacraig was that the teaching was poor. I left with no certificates and my English and maths were poor.
60. The only thing I really didn't like about Balnacraig was the way Mr SGQ [REDACTED] and Mr GHG [REDACTED] interacted with some of the girls. There was one girl, [REDACTED] who used to sit on Mr SGQ [REDACTED]'s knee and was all over him. Mr SGQ [REDACTED] would sometimes try and encourage me to sit on his knee or on the arm of his chair beside him. I refused. Other girls did the same to Mr GHG [REDACTED]. This was inappropriate and it was wrong. There was a girl called [REDACTED], her nickname was [REDACTED], and she used to sit on Mr GHG [REDACTED] knee.
61. Mr SGQ [REDACTED] and Mr GHG [REDACTED] used to call me BB, which was short for boobs and bum. They never tried anything on with me or did anything sexual. I think they just thought it was all banter. I had come from an abusive background and I didn't like the way they were with the girls.
62. The only thing Mr SGQ [REDACTED] ever did to me was he slapped me on the back of my head. He hit me when I went into his office. He would clap me on the back of my head and when I told him to stop he just said he was helping me on my way.

63. If two girls were fighting in Balnacraig you would be made to put boxing gloves on in the recreation room and fight it out. Mr ^{SGQ} and Mr ^{GHG} would make you. They would make you do this even if you didn't want to fight. The fight sometimes only stopped when there was blood but not always. This happened to me and a girl called . I didn't want to fight and I tried to run away. I was called a coward. and were once fighting with gloves. was a much bigger girl but really beat the crap out of her and it was eventually stopped. Mr ^{SGQ} was trying to stop it but they kept on fighting. We all had to sit and watch the boxing. If anyone got hurt they got treated by a member of staff in the medical centre within Balnacraig.

Leaving Balnacraig

64. After the first year of me being there I was asked if I wanted to stay at my mum's house then come back into Balnacraig during the day for school lessons. I was frightened initially because I was worried they would give my bed away to someone else. Mr ^{SGQ} assured me that this wouldn't happen. I agreed to it because I knew I could go back any time. I was supposed to go back to live with my mum but I actually stayed at my friend's house.
65. I subsequently left Balnacraig. I had found a boyfriend and refused to go back to school and thought I knew better so I left. I left just before I was sixteen. I think Mr ^{SGQ} was quite upset that I had left. After I left Balnacraig I never saw Cath Coutts or anyone from the social work department again.

Reporting of abuse at Balnacraig

66. I never told anyone about what was happening at Balnacraig.

Life after being in care

67. I had my son [REDACTED] when I was seventeen years old. Initially I stayed with my mum but my brother [REDACTED] became very violent towards me and I couldn't carry on living there. I was scared of him. Eventually, when my son was about one year old and I was eighteen the council found me a house. I actually refused to go to that house because it got broken into before I actually moved in and all my property was stolen. I stayed with some of my boyfriend's family but it didn't work out so I had to move home again. [REDACTED]'s verbal abuse continued. It was hell living at my mum's.
68. Eventually the council found me a house in 1982 [REDACTED] in Perth. When I was living there I met my husband [REDACTED] and to him I had my daughter. We separated when I was pregnant for a while but got back together when my daughter was two. We lived [REDACTED] in Perth for the next eight years. Our life then was quite comfortable. I worked beside my husband for a while for a [REDACTED] DIY business. I had to give this up in 1991 when I was diagnosed with orbital varices. I haven't worked since.
69. In 1993 I was visited by the police as [REDACTED], my sister, had made an allegation against my dad. I told them I couldn't be part of it and didn't make a statement. I did tell them that [REDACTED] was telling the truth. [REDACTED] later dropped the charges.
70. In June 1995 I was visited by the police and the social work department. They were following up claims that my daughter, who was eleven at the time, had been sexually abused by my husband. My whole world just crumbled. My husband subsequently committed suicide.
71. A few years ago I hurt my back and ever since I have been suffering serious back pain. No-one ever believed me until a scan was done and they saw a little bone growing into the nerve column. This damaged the nerve and I now have to walk with the aid of a walking stick. I had a seizure in October 2017 and I have been diagnosed with either epilepsy or early onset dementia. This is still under investigation. I had my driving licence taken off me though.

72. I haven't spoken to my dad in the last twenty years. I keep in touch with my sister [REDACTED], but not very often.

Impact

73. I have times when I feel very, very low. I have contemplated suicide in the past but thinking about my children has stopped me. I am often depressed but have never been diagnosed as suffering from depression.
74. I self-harmed as a child. The first time was before I went into care. I regularly have nightmares especially about the first few years of my life. It is quite difficult to say how much my time at home, my time in care and my life after care has impacted on me. I don't trust any men any more but that is probably what I went through with my husband.
75. My education was poor at Balnacraig. When I left there my English was very poor and didn't even know where to put a comma in a sentence. I never really got taught anything in there.

Treatment / Support

76. I have been to Moray Royal Infirmary where I have had five sets of therapy sessions. I have also been to pain session clinics. I have suffered from insomnia since my husband died. I was given sleeping tablets at one point but they were taken off me because they said they were addictive. I am currently on pain relief, sleeping tablets and Migraine medication.

Records

77. I have never seen or asked to see any of my records.

Lessons to be learned

78. I was let down by Cath Coutts from the social work department [Secondary Institutions -
[Secondary Institutions - to be published later] I blame what has
happened to me on Cath Coutts because she just didn't listen to me.
79. To prevent what happened to me happening to other children in the future I think
there has to be better vetting of social workers. I just don't think they have been
getting vetted properly.
80. [Secondary Institutions - to be published later] At
Balnacraig the schooling was poor so I think they have to make the schooling better.

Other information

81. I have been back to Ryehill just to take my kids back to show them where I was
brought up. That would have been in the early 1990s. The building has been
demolished and new houses have been built on the site. I have been back to
Balnacraig too because I had questions to ask Mr [SGQ] Mr [SGQ] had retired
by then. I met him but his wife was there so I couldn't really ask him what I wanted to
ask. He invited me to go back and see him some other time but I haven't been.
82. I went back to Balnacraig about seven years ago and I went inside. It took me back
when I was there and I remembered every room in there. It is still operating as a
children's home but the children were running riot and seemed to be even worse
than when I was there. Staff had no discipline.
83. 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 [HOB] Dated 22 3 2018