

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

HBZ

Support person present: No

1. My name is HBZ. My date of birth is 1955. My contact details are known to the Inquiry. I wish to provide a statement on behalf of my late father, HBG.
2. My father spoke to me about his experiences in care at Rossie Farm School. After my father died my mother also told me certain things that he had told her but which he had not told me. These things related to abuse.
3. Many years after being in care, my dad wrote down his experience at Rossie Farm School and the family had this published privately as ' ' by HBG.
4. My father was named HBG, born 1916. My dad had a twin brother, . The reason my father had the middle name HBG and his brother was named is because their father had worked with . I can't remember my Grandfather's name but he had a plane and offered pleasure flights across the Firth of Forth.

Life before going into care

5. My father had a difficult childhood. His twin died, followed by his mother, and then his father. He went to live with his maternal grandmother who had two daughters. The grandmother died as did one of her daughters. He went to live with the other daughter

and her husband Mr [REDACTED]. They had a daughter called [REDACTED] who suffered from Tuberculosis in the bones and was an invalid. Mrs [REDACTED] then died and my dad was left with Mr [REDACTED] who was not a blood relative, and his daughter. I tend to refer to Mr [REDACTED] as Grandpa [REDACTED]. Because my dad had been taken in by his aunt, Mrs [REDACTED], he never felt connected to the family after she died.

6. My father started going to school in Musselburgh. Then Grandpa [REDACTED] moved to [REDACTED] in Edinburgh and my dad went to school locally there, but he was a very troubled child. He didn't get a great deal of schooling as he kept running away from home. I don't think that was because of one specific incident rather the accumulation of difficulties. When Grandpa [REDACTED] moved to [REDACTED], he hired a housekeeper. The housekeeper was very fond of [REDACTED] but she did not like my dad. She made his life very difficult and she battered him. When Grandpa [REDACTED] would come home from work the housekeeper would bombard him with a list of my father's sins. Although [REDACTED] was very close to my dad, he was older and she was an invalid so she couldn't do much to protect him.
7. When he was fourteen my father stole five pounds from Grandpa [REDACTED] so he could run away to sea. He got as far as Dunbar before he was apprehended. Grandpa [REDACTED] decided to press charges and my dad was taken to court. He was told that Grandpa [REDACTED] no longer wanted him back so my dad was sent to Rossie Farm School. I think Grandpa [REDACTED] did care for my dad but it was a very difficult time for him due to losing his wife and not knowing how to handle my dad. It was complicated.

Rossie Farm School, Montrose 1929 to 1934

8. My dad was very ashamed and embarrassed at having been sent to Rossie. It was an approved school, for bad boys. I don't know how my dad travelled to Rossie.
9. Rossie was a big gloomy old place and was run as a farm-school. The kids worked outdoors and the school would sell the produce. It was pretty spartan. When he arrived, my dad met Mr [REDACTED] [HBT] [REDACTED] [SNR] who was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [SNR] [REDACTED]. He

was allocated to a team. My dad told me he tried to engage Mr HBT in conversation but it was clear the staff didn't form personal relationships with the children. My dad was told to stay quiet and do what he was told. It was a quasi-military set-up and very regimented

10. The idea was the boys were there because they were bad kids and they needed to be punished rather than rehabilitated. It was more of a punitive regime rather than a military regime. I remember my dad saying it was run along military lines. The boys would have to line up for inspection, but I don't know if that was every day or not. My dad hated that military aspect of the place.
11. I remember my dad telling me that the way the authorities at Rossie controlled the boys, who could be up to 18 or 19, was to infantilise them. Pretty much Marshall discipline imposed. The boys had no autonomy, they weren't allowed to make decisions. That's why the boys weren't prepared for life outside Rossie, they weren't encouraged to take responsibility for themselves. They were treated like children and then expected to go out into the world and make their way.

Mornings and bedtime

12. The boys slept in dormitories. My father never mentioned how many boys were in each dormitory. I gather there were quite a few boys in total. They all had to get up together, get washed, and go down for breakfast.

Mealtimes/Food

13. I think the food was basic fare at Rossie, things like porridge. I don't remember my dad ever saying that the boys were hungry but there were no luxuries, just basic food.

Washing/bathing

14. The bathroom was a big room with lots of baths. The matron would make all the boys line up naked at bath time. This was done once a week. They had communal baths,

they were not left with a shred of dignity. My father would never have expected to do that before he went to Rossie. It was my father's theory that this was all part of what the staff thought they were there to do, to rob the children of dignity and treat them like infants in order to control them. As far as I remember my dad said it was a big room with baths and everyone was herded in together. I don't know if the boys had to share a bath. I can't remember if my dad mentioned if the water was hot or cold.

Clothing/uniform

15. The boys did have to wear a uniform and it was quite distinctive. It would make the boys stand out if they tried to run away, they would immediately be spotted. I can't recall the details of what my dad said the uniform was but I think it was militaristic. One of the things that happened was that when my dad got home leave he didn't want to go home wearing the uniform as it would make him stick out like a sore thumb. Mr HBT contacted Grandpa [REDACTED]. Grandpa [REDACTED] got new clothes for my dad, so when he got home he was able to change out of his uniform and he just looked like every other boy of that age. My dad always thought that was a very kind thing for Mr HBT to do and he really appreciated that.

School

16. There was some education at Rossie, but it was pretty basic. There were workshops where the boys learned carpentry and things like that. My dad was interested in engineering and science.
17. When the Mr HBT realised my dad was a bit different from some of the boys, a bit brighter, he tried to help my dad. When it came close to leaving Rossie and my dad was trying to work out what he was going to do in life, he asked Mr HBT for help in relation to science and engineering. Mr HBT bought some books for my dad. As far as I can work out my dad was the only boy at Rossie who Mr HBT helped in that way. I think the staff just expected that the boys would go and do manual labouring jobs.

18. One of the things my dad said was that the structure of life at Rossie Farm School completely failed to prepare the boys for life outside. They were treated like children, there wasn't any attempt to make them take responsibility for themselves, they were just thrown out into the outside world and expected to make their way.

Personal possessions

19. People back then didn't have much in the way of personal possessions and I don't remember my dad mentioning anything specific. I got the impression it wasn't something that was encouraged at Rossie Farm School.

Chores

20. The boys had to work in the farm attached to the school. People were expected to go out and work from the age of fourteen in those days. I think it was a case of placing the boys who were ready to leave in some form of employment. Expectations for the boys after leaving Rossie weren't high but if they had experience of farm work, that would be something.

Religious instruction

21. The kids would be taken to the local village on Sundays for church service. I suppose that would be Church of Scotland, I don't think my dad would have known. My parents weren't religious, they were humanists.
22. My dad told me that the boys would be frog-marched to church on a Sunday in single file and he said that he found this humiliating. They were all wearing the uniform of Rossie Farm School and it meant they were singled out. The people from the villages around Rossie could easily identify them as, "The bad boys."

Trips/Holidays

23. My dad did get home leave, I just don't know how often he got it. He went back to stay with Grandpa [REDACTED] and I believe he got the train back and forth to Rossie.

Visits

24. I don't know if my dad had any visitors at Rossie Farm School. Almost everybody in his family had died, he just had Grandpa [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] but I don't know if they ever visited. There was a lot of emotional stress between Grandpa [REDACTED] and my dad. I think Grandpa [REDACTED] felt guilty about the events that had led to my dad being sent to Rossie. It took a long time for their relationship to repair.

Healthcare

25. There was a matron and she was the only woman at Rossie Farm School. From what I can gather, she was a bit of a sadist. She used to like to humiliate the boys. They would have to get stripped off for shared baths and would be lined up for inspection. My dad didn't elaborate further about the inspection.

Running away

26. My dad did try to run away from Rossie Farm School but I can't remember the details. There would have been a punishment for running away. I can't remember any specific reason for him running away, it was just the accumulation of his experiences.

Bed Wetting

27. Although I'm sure it must have happened, I don't remember my dad mentioning anything about bed wetting.

Abuse at Rossie Farm School

28. From what I have been told, by my mother after my father's death, there was a lot of physical and sexual abuse of younger boys by the older boys. It was a very harsh environment. I don't recall any mention of teachers or staff being responsible for any sexual abuse. My dad was physically quite a small person, I can imagine him getting picked on.
29. There was plenty of physical abuse. Mr [REDACTED] caned the boys. Staff members would refer boys to Mr [REDACTED] for corporal punishment and the boys would go to Mr [REDACTED] office. I think my dad did receive corporal punishment from Mr [REDACTED]. Boys could be punished for even the slightest deviation from the strict regime, talking after lights out, for example. I can't recall any other reasons for boys being beaten, I got the impression it could be for next to nothing. I can't recall my dad ever mentioning Mr [REDACTED] referring to any written records about discipline.
30. My dad talked several times about something that happened to one of his friends who was at Rossie Farm School at the same time as my dad. That boy had been apprenticed off to a nearby farm. The farmer beat the boy, abused him, and starved him. I can't remember if my dad mentioned the name of the farmer. Eventually the farmer threw the boy into a pig trough in the middle of winter and the boy developed pneumonia and died. That made a huge impression on my dad, the terrible lack of humanity. I can't remember the name of that boy, it may be in my dad's book.

Leaving Rossie Farm School

31. I don't think my dad was given any preparation for leaving Rossie Farm School. No-one told him what he was expected to do. I think he was singled out positively by Mr [REDACTED] giving him books to try and help him learn about science and engineering. My dad was a great reader and wanted to learn. I think he impressed Mr [REDACTED] as being

different to the other boys at Rossie Farm School. Although I understand that Mr HBT was very strict as SNR, my dad didn't hold that against him. My dad respected that Mr HBT had a job to do and was doing the best he could. He had no bitterness towards Mr HBT.

32. My dad was quite an introverted person, he didn't have many friends. He said he found it quite lonely living back in Edinburgh with Grandpa because he didn't have any friends his own age. In terms of socialising with his peers, he was quite badly emotionally scarred by his experiences in Rossie Farm School. He was left with the feeling that he was marked as being a bad person. It was a huge social stigma to have been in an approved school. In later life, when he had his own business and his own social circle, there were very few people who knew he had been in Rossie Farm School.

Life after being in care

33. My dad was released from Rossie Farm School when he was eighteen. He went back and lived with Grandpa, and the housekeeper. Grandpa and a couple of his brothers had a refrigeration business at. Initially the brothers said that they didn't want anything to do with my dad as he was a bad lad. They didn't want to give him a job in the refrigeration firm. I can remember my dad describing walking around Edinburgh during the depression looking for a job. However, by the time he had been released from Rossie Farm School he was too old for an apprenticeship. Eventually, Grandpa persuaded his brothers to let my dad come and work in the business. My dad was a great success in the business and Grandpa brothers warmed to him.
34. Then my dad joined the army. He was a telephone engineer. He did very well in the army. He always said that it was the army that made him because it gave him confidence. He had a technical job and was teaching other people how to do it. He became a Lance Corporal. He could have gone further but he didn't like parades and things from his time at Rossie, he was always a bit of a rebel.

35. He was demobbed from the army at the end of World War 2. When he left the army he got a glowing recommendation. He would have liked to go on as a telephone engineer but he had to go back to Edinburgh because at that point Grandpa [REDACTED] business was beginning to fail and my dad felt he had to go home and bail them out which my mother never forgave him for. She felt it ruined his life, he had a lot of potential. He came out of the army as a young man and he could have gone on to a proper career but he felt obliged to try and rescue the ailing business and look after my aunt [REDACTED] who had never married, and Grandpa [REDACTED] who was getting older. At that time Grandpa [REDACTED] was living in a bungalow in Corstorphine. Grandpa [REDACTED] and his brothers were still involved in the business but I don't think they were very good business men.
36. My dad met my mother in 1954. My aunt [REDACTED] had set up [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. My mum came up to work at the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in Edinburgh. She joined the [REDACTED] group, which at that time met at my aunt's house and that's where she met my dad.
37. At around that time Grandpa [REDACTED] former housekeeper contacted my father asking for help and she came to live with my dad, Grandpa [REDACTED] and Aunt [REDACTED]. My dad did the best he could to help her. My mum could never understand how my dad could be so forgiving, but that's the kind of person he was. Eventually my dad took over Grandpa [REDACTED] business.
38. In later life, in the 1960's, my dad was involved in helping to set up a children's home. It was called [REDACTED] and continued as a provider of supported accommodation for vulnerable young people after the residential homes of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] closed. They did have two residential homes but they closed and they continued by providing flats but without any resident staff. It might still be operating although I've not had any contact for many years. They had two residential homes in Edinburgh. The Humanist Society had bought the buildings and installed two couples as housekeepers. They were run like a family home. It was all boys who stayed in the homes. I don't think there were that many residents.

39. My dad worked with boys who were disturbed because he felt he had an insight into their circumstances. His theory was that if a child is under emotional pressure that build up then their reaction is a sort of un-thought-out impulse. They just want to get out of that situation.
40. My dad told me about the abuse he suffered in Rossie Farm School but he didn't tell my brother. It came out because for a while he was involved in the children's home in Edinburgh. There was a boy called [REDACTED] who had been in care who came to work as an apprentice in my dad's company. He had a very troubled upbringing and had been involved in crime. He had been in Rossie Farm School. He came to live with us. It all seemed to go ok for a while but that fell apart eventually.
41. Eventually Grandpa [REDACTED] died and by that stage my dad was running the refrigeration business which he did until he retired. He passed the business on to the people who had been his apprentices but he still kept an active involvement in the business. Then it all went wrong. The business went bankrupt. It was all to do with patents not being registered. That kind of broke his spirit. The idea of ending up as a bankrupt was quite shocking for someone of his generation. My dad died in 1989

Impact

42. My dad's time in care at Rossie Farm School had a huge impact on my father, he was scarred by it. He carried that stigma of being in an approved school all his life. It wasn't just that he was in care, he was marked out as being bad. The idea of locking someone up for five years for stealing five pounds seems incredible really.

Reporting of Abuse

43. I am not aware of my father making any report about the abuse at Rossie Farm School.

Records

44. To my knowledge, my dad did not request his records from Rossie Farm School.

Lessons to be learned

45. I don't know how my dad would feel about the Inquiry. As far as he was concerned it was all a long time ago. He wouldn't have been interested in any feeling of revenge about his time in care. He wasn't the least bit vindictive or angry about what happened to him

Other information

46. 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.....
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HBZ

Dated..... 11 January 2021