

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MKW

Support person present: No

1. My name is MKW. My date of birth is 1960. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before boarding school

2. When I was born, my mother and father, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were living in Africa. My father was working there. I have one brother, [REDACTED] who is three years older than me. We moved back to Scotland when I was seven and we lived there for a year. I went to primary school in Fort William joining in primary 3. My mother and father returned to Africa and continued living there until I was thirteen. My mother now lives in the north of Scotland. My father died in 2001.
3. When I was eight my parents decided that I should go to a boarding school. They both had strong beliefs in education and Catholicism. My father told me when I was older that they believed Scotland had a better education system than England. They thought St Columba's College boarding school in Largs would provide me with a sound education and good religious values. There was no history of boarding schools in my family. I believe that my father's company paid for me to go to boarding school and for the flights back and forward to Africa at holiday time. My brother went to a different boarding school in Scotland then joined me for the last two years at St Joseph's College boarding school in Dumfries.

St Columba's Boarding School, Largs

4. St Columba's was a large Edwardian style house off the main coast road between Largs and Greenock. Through the front door were classrooms and a small parlour room where there was a piano. There were at least three classrooms but possibly more. At the back was a refectory and a kitchen. Upstairs were dormitories and above that the attic had been converted into more dormitories. On this floor was a big bathroom. It had lots of sinks round it and possibly a bath. On the left side of the building there were old stable type buildings which had been converted into living accommodation. That is where the Marist brothers lived.
5. At the back of the building was a grassy, wooded bank which led to a golf course. Half way up this hill was a shrine with a statue of 'Our lady'. Across the road from the main building were playing fields and beyond that was the pebbled beach and the sea. Beside the fields was a cottage where someone from the school lived. I don't know who this was.
6. I would imagine that there were between 100 and 200 boys at St Columba's. The age range was from P4 to P7. There were no girls. The youngest boys were in the dorms in the attic and as you got older you moved downstairs. The dorms were lined with metal framed beds and had thin mattresses and woolly blankets. They were not comfortable.
7. Brother Nigel was the head Marist. He was old and was a chain smoker. His hands were yellow and the front of his sutan was always covered in ash. I am not sure what the hierarchy structure was under him but other brothers were Brother MFN Brother MLA Brother Daniel-Joseph, and Brother Damien. Daniel-Joseph was popular because he was younger and was sporty. He left the order to get married. I don't know any of their other names.
8. All of the brothers were teachers. The Marist Brothers was a teaching order. They all wore long black sutans, which are also called cassocks. At the neck and chest was a white plastic panel and collar which was split down the middle. Round their waist was

a cord with tassels and three knots along it. The knots represented their commitments which were poverty, chastity and obedience. There were other lay staff there like cooks and cleaners but I can't remember them.

Routine at St Columba's College, Largs

First day

9. I have no real recollection of my first day at St Columba's. I seem to recall I visited the school with my mother some time before my first day. All my clothes and equipment had been bought previously at a school outfitters in Paisley.

Mornings and bedtime

10. I only have vague memories of the morning routine at St Columba's. I remember the Marist Brothers would come into the dorms, switch the lights on and tell us it was time to get up. We would get washed and dressed then go for breakfast. We then went to school. In the evening when we were in our dorm at ten to nine a Marist brother would come and say "It's ten to nine, its toilet time". We would then all go the toilet then get in our beds. At nine o'clock it was 'lights out'. A Marist Brother may have slept in the main building through the night but I don't remember what the arrangements were for this.
11. There was no talking through the night and no reading under the covers. I cannot remember if the Marist Brothers patrolled through the night.

Mealtimes/Food

12. I cannot remember much about the food. The only thing I recall was that the food was fairly boring and typical boarding school fayre. One of the Marist Brothers would supervise us in the dining room. If ever you were given food that you didn't like then you didn't eat it and you went hungry. I can't recall there ever being any issue with

food being left on plates. Even though I didn't like some of the food I was hungry so I ate it. We never got any sweets or crisps or anything like that. There was no tuck shop.

13. The Marist Brothers ate in a separate dining room and their food was much better quality than our food was. I know that because we got their leftovers. They often got fancy food like pork chops and other food that we didn't get. When they had finished, what they left was shared out between the boys. I can't remember how the food was distributed and how it was decided who got it.

Washing/bathing

14. I don't actually recall having a bath or a shower at St Columba's. My only recollection is standing at the sinks and getting washed. The only bathroom I remember was the one up in the attic.

Clothing/uniform

15. We had a school uniform to wear which was grey shorts, blue woolly socks, black shoes, grey cotton short and a v-necked blue jumper with a gold stripe, a blue blazer and a school cap which had the school badge and a gold circle on the top. We wore school clothes most of the time. We had other casual clothes which we referred to as 'civvies'. We were allowed to wear them at weekends and some other times. I was referred to usually by my surname or my number, which at St Columba's was number [REDACTED]. They usually only used the number when doing a roll call. My name or number was sewn into all of my clothes by my mother.

Leisure time

16. I am not sure if there was a living room or play room. After school there would be a period of time until the evening meal. In this period we would play outside. At some point there was a homework session too. We were allowed in to the dormitories later on where we would sit in our pyjamas and read or chat with our friends.

17. I was never really a team player and wasn't interested in any of the games like football, rugby and cricket. Sometimes I was made to play under duress but when I wasn't I went down to the beach, when I was allowed, and did some beach combing. I preferred to do that. I did some other sports but not really as part of a team. I also read books. I don't really remember if there were any board games.
18. At weekends some of the boys who stayed locally went home to their families. On a couple of occasions I was invited and went home with a couple of these boys at the weekend.

Trips and holidays

19. At holiday times I would go back to visit my family in Africa. I would go there usually twice a year. Other holidays I would spend with relatives in Glasgow or Mallaig. The school would usually arrange to drop me off and pick me up at the airport but sometimes I would get the train. Depending on flight times I may have occasionally stayed overnight with an aunt in Glasgow. Air companies were very good at that time and the staff catered for a lot of young travellers who may have been boarders. They had designated 'aunties' who were airport ground staff and part of their role was to look after these children. It was an effective system for corralling and shepherding children around.
20. Occasionally we would go for organised walks with the Marist Brothers. We went as a group up onto the golf course at the back of the school. We also sometimes went to the beach on an outing. We had inter school team sport events like football or rugby. I would go along and support the team. We also got taken to the cinema a couple of times.

School

21. Marist Brothers did the teaching. Brother MFN taught the youngest children. He was quite well liked because he did silly things. He did have a temper though. I didn't enjoy school. It was a very traditional style of teaching. I was told to 'read this' or 'do

these sums'. I don't remember there being one on one tuition based on an individual's needs. My performance was usually fairly mid ranking in the classroom.

Healthcare

22. I don't really remember much about any visits to the doctor or dentist. I remember I cut my leg at some point and it became infected. I had a bandage on my leg which had to regularly get changed but I cannot recall who changed it.

Religious instruction

23. We got some religious education as part of our schooling in the classroom. There was no church within the grounds of St Columba's. On Sundays we used to go by minibus to the local church in Largs. I don't recall the religious instruction being over the top or particularly onerous. I don't think we had a choice whether we went to Mass on Sunday.

Birthdays and Christmas

24. Birthdays were celebrated but only if parents sent in money for a cake. One of the Marist brothers would be at the evening meal and orchestrate the singing of 'Happy Birthday'. I don't recall getting a birthday cake and it could have been because my mother didn't bother or because I was home at summer holiday time when it was my birthday.

Visits/Inspections

25. My mother occasionally visited me on a Saturday when she was back from Africa. She signed me out and took me out for the day, but to be honest there wasn't much to do in Largs. It was quite an emotional day when she came. In a way it would probably have been better if she hadn't come as it was quite disruptive as we were given some freedom and then at the end we were put back to the school and probably felt more

homesick than if she hadn't come at all. Visits for me and others usually happened at the weekend.

26. I am not really aware of any official visitors coming in to do any inspections. Neither do I recall ever seeing any dignitaries or religious church figures from higher up in the Catholic church.

Family contact

27. There were weekly writing sessions where we wrote letters for our parents. This was on Saturday mornings. We were not allowed to seal the envelopes and had to hand them to the Marist Brothers to post for us. When I received letters from my mother they were opened before I got them. This is something which angers me now. I can see why they wanted to see what I was telling my parents about the school and what my mother's replies were. This was a fundamental breach of my human rights that I cannot communicate with my mother without it being scrutinised. We were not there as a result of having committed crime, nor were we a threat to national security. I cannot see any justification for them doing this.

Personal possessions

28. We had a locker where we could keep any personal possessions. I seem to remember having a yo-yo and a couple of other toys.

Running away

29. I never ran away. I might have thought about it but never did. I was probably too frightened.

Bed Wetting

30. There were a couple of boys who used to wet their beds. Other boys would hear about it and comments would be made. There wasn't any real peer bullying. There was one

boy who had a bad skin condition and had scabs on his legs. He was unhappy at school. I can remember him being bathed but I am not sure if it was because he had wet the bed or if it was to help his skin condition.

Abuse at St Columba's

31. Brother ^{MFN} taught the youngest children in the school. They were eight and nine. He disciplined them according to the type of misdemeanour. There was a sliding scale of severity of punishment. Minor misdemeanours he would hit you on the palm of your hand with a wooden ruler. More serious things were dealt with by the leather tawse on your hand. He would do these in the class room in front of all the other children. I only recall him belting a boy a couple of times. His last measure would be to take you into his parlour and nip your bottom. He did this to me once and it was over my clothes. There may have been one other boy in the parlour with me but I can't remember who. Brother ^{MFN} used his fingernail when he did this to make it sore. I don't know what I had done for him to punish me.
32. I saw other boys getting taken into the parlour by Brother ^{MFN} on other occasions and they told me later that they had been nipped by him on the bottom. Some told me, but I can't remember who, that they had been nipped on the bare bottom. I think that was the sorest way to get nipped.
33. One time I saw Brother ^{MFN} lose his temper and slap a boy full across the face in the class. I cannot remember what happened in the lead up to this incident or who the boy was. I also remember him hitting a boy with a garden cane on the hand. The boy's hand ended up cut and was bleeding.
34. After Brother ^{MFN} I moved to my next teacher, Brother ^{MLA}. Sometimes he lost his temper in the class. He threw chalk and blackboard dusters across the room. One time I remember him grabbing a boy and pulling him across the desk. Another time he slammed a boy against the wall and pinned him there. I can't remember who these boys were. I was scared of Brother ^{MLA}. He was a big tough angry guy.

35. There was never any compassion shown when I was at St Columba's. It was never a value that featured there. Neither was wilful cruelty evident. It was more a Victorian view was taken that children should be managed, seen and not heard, and that they should obey the rules. The attitude was that there was no point in blubbing or complaining about it because that wasn't going to help anybody. Had I gone to a Marist Brother at any point and told them I was feeling homesick or unwell I don't think they would have turned me away. I never, at any point, went to them looking for any kind of support.
36. I once had a bad nightmare through the night one time when I was about nine. I obviously couldn't go to my parents as I would have done if I was at home and got into their bed. Instead I went to a friend who was in another dorm and I lay on his bed for a while until I composed myself. I think this shows that I couldn't go to the Marist Brothers for comfort or support and instead went to my friend. This was quite a high risk thing to do as others may have seen this as some sort of homosexual act. This was the only occasion that I recall that I needed any sort of human compassion.

Reporting of abuse at St Columba's

37. I never told anybody anything about what was going on at St Columba's. I never sat down with my parents and told them I was unhappy. I didn't want to upset them. There was no-one at St Columba's that I would have trusted to speak to.

Leaving St Columba's

38. By the end of my time at St Columba's I was more or less accepting that my parents had put me there and that I was focussed on surviving where I was. I was accepting that the regime was what it was and that was just the way life was. It wasn't my place to make value judgements of these people who were supposed to be looking after me. I was a child and that was my mind-set at the time.

39. Columba's was a natural feeder school for St Joseph's College in Dumfries. I left St Columba's College at the end of P6. I went to St Joseph's at the start of P7. St Joseph's as well as being a high school also had P6 and P7. I think I went to St Joseph's for P7 because I had a good friend at St Columba's who was a year older than me so I think I pleaded with my parents and they organised it. I don't recall having to sit any exam to go to St Joseph's.

St Joseph's College, Dumfries

40. St Joseph's College was on a much bigger site than St Columba's. It was purpose built as a school and was made of red sandstone. There was a large entrance door which led into a hall. Boys weren't allowed to use this door apart from on special occasions. On the wall was a plaque with a list of all the headmasters names. Through the entrance hall was an open hallway where there was the dining room and refectory and on the right was the bursar's office. Along from there was a corridor to some classrooms. There was a staircase from the hall which led to the first level where there were more classrooms. Above that level were dormitories. There may have been a fourth level.
41. Out the back of the building there was an extension to the building which contained the tuck shop. Beside that were the toilets. Beside that outside was a football pitch. There was another two storey detached house which was the common room for the fifth and sixth year boys. We called it the ranch. Between the ranch and the main building was the sports block which contained the hall and all the gym equipment.
42. Along from there was a garden area and a lawn with a path through it. Boys weren't allowed in there. Beyond that there was a church on the site, more football pitches and a tarmacked walled area. There was a six foot high wall around the whole compound. There was another house where the priest lived. We referred to him as **zmmL** He had a garden which was an unofficial arena where fights took place between the boys. There were other single storey pre-fabricated buildings. In there was a recreation area with table tennis tables and a television and other stuff. There was another three storey

sandstone building. On the ground or first floor were the P6 and P7 classrooms. Above that level were dormitories for fifth and sixth year boys.

43. The main living accommodation for the Marist brothers was in a separate house. It was an Edwardian style house and was referred to as the 'Mount' and was right beside the cemetery. Their bedrooms and living areas were in there. They had their own booze store here.
44. I am not sure how many children were at the school, maybe between 200 and 300 boys. No girls. Marist Brothers stayed on site and the lay teachers lived outside and came in each day. I can't remember the proper name of the SNR [REDACTED] who was there when I arrived. His nickname was MYZ [REDACTED] because he was only about [REDACTED]. He was replaced by Brother MMK [REDACTED] My first dorm master who slept in a room within our dorm initially was Brother CIPHER WI [REDACTED] He was old and I think he had retired as a teacher. That was in the main building in the dorm on the fourth floor. His room was just inside the doorway into our dorm. The next SNR [REDACTED] who took over from Brother MMK [REDACTED] and was there until I left was Brother MLU [REDACTED]

Routine at St Joseph's

First day

45. I don't actually remember my first day at St Joseph's. I don't recall any induction or being shown around.

Mornings and bedtime

46. We were woken up in the morning by the dorm master who would switch the lights on. We would get up, washed, dressed and go down for breakfast. After that we would go to our school classes. We would have a morning break, when we would play outside. We would go to the refectory for lunch. School would go until half past three or four o'clock.

47. In the evening we would go to our dormitories a while before bedtime and sit and chat or read books. Before 'lights out' the younger ones had to line up in the dorm to go to the toilet and take it in turns to go. 'Lights out' was between nine and nine thirty. If you went to the toilet within half an hour of going to bed you were punished. The Marist brother had a room within our dorm so you had to sneak past his door to get out unnoticed. If he caught you, the punishment depended on his frame of mind and his level of sobriety. After this half hour period had ended you could go to the toilet without punishment. This half hour didn't really apply when you got a bit older. It was more relaxed and it wasn't enforced.
48. The dorm master occasionally did a dorm patrol, looking for boys reading with torches under the covers or for missing boys or for any other mischief. I occasionally sneaked out and went to the pub when I was older, fifteen, but was never caught.

Mealtimes/Food

49. All the children ate at the same time in the dining room. Food was pretty grim. The same meals were repeated every seven days. Food was cooked in the kitchen and put in ashets then placed on hot trays. We had designated tables to sit at depending on our age and our house. A nominated person from each table would then bring the food back to the table and serve it up. You were never forced to eat the food that was served up to you. There was a top table where a duty Marist would sit. At lunchtime the lay teachers would sit at the top table. The rest of the Marist brothers ate separately from us in another room. If you were hungry at any other time you could go to the pantry where you got ad-hoc bread and margarine.

Washing/bathing

50. As we got older we had showers with cubicles which were private. The other option was to wash at the communal basins in the washroom. I think we just washed as and when we wanted. I don't remember being supervised when showering.

Clothing/uniform

51. We had a school uniform which was a shirt, pullover and blazer. We got to wear long trousers at St Joseph's. My number at St Joseph's was No [REDACTED] which again would have been sewn into my clothes. The Marist Brothers would usually refer to boys by their surname but would use their number when doing a roll call in class. School uniform was generally worn through the week and there was more scope to wear 'civvies' at the weekend.

Leisure time

52. When the school day finished there was a break before our evening meal. After our meal we did homework between six and seven thirty. We would then go to our dormitories although as we got older we were allowed to go to the recreation area for a while. It became a bit more relaxed in the dormitory too as we were allowed radios or record players.
53. Boys were allowed at certain times at the weekend to go into Dumfries. There was a newsagent just outside the grounds so we went down there sometimes to buy single cigarettes. We occasionally sneaked out to go there out-with these times. I think the Marist Brothers knew and turned a blind eye to it sometimes. There was more tolerance of things like that at St Joseph's. At fifteen I was going out with other boys and we would go into pubs or buy alcohol at off-licences and drink it in the town's cemetery. This probably gave me credibility and stopped me from being bullied by the other boys.
54. Once a year we had our school sports day. There were lots of individual events like javelin, and discus. I used to love doing that but we didn't do this as a matter of course in physical education. The school had a system in place to identify any pupil who showed any talent in any sport. They would be developed because it would look good for the school.

55. As we got older we did get more and more freedom. We were allowed in to Dumfries and wandered about the town. On a Saturday we sometimes went as a group walking the countryside. This was without staff so we could smoke and drink if we wanted. We did sometimes go out for walks with staff too.

School

56. Marist Brothers did the teaching but there were also lay teachers who came in. I didn't do particularly well at school. I was usually in the lower third of the class. In my second last year there I knuckled down and spent a fair bit of time in the library. My performance really improved but the year after it dropped again. I think I did this just to prove that I could do it. I wasn't really motivated at school to do well. None of my teachers inspired me. They were an authoritarian regime whose job was to teach me. I never felt that I wanted to please them. I don't recall any praise or recognition for good work in the classroom.

Healthcare

57. There was a matron but I cannot remember her name. She was a big dominating woman who was an ex-nurse. She wasn't ever very sympathetic. There was a sick bay if you were ever in quarantine. I went there once when I had chicken pox.
58. When I was about twelve or thirteen I had to wait with all the other boys in a long line. We had to drop our pants then wait for the matron to feel our scrotum and check that we had two testicles. This examination may have been done in private in her room but we certainly had to wait in line.
59. We got dental care in Dumfries and we got taken there. Nobody liked going because the dentist, Mr Multree, was a very large man with fat fingers who smoked. He didn't wear gloves and he stuck his big, fat, nicotine stained fingers in your mouth and poked around. It wasn't pleasant.

Religious instruction

60. We had religious education as part of the school curriculum. On a Sunday morning there was mass which we had to go to. Only the non-Catholic children didn't have to go to this. On a Wednesday evening we had Benediction. I don't think it was obligatory but it looked good for you if you went. We had confession and that was done by the priest who we knew as [REDACTED] zMML He seemed to be a reasonable genial character.

Visits/Inspections

61. My mother came and visited me a couple of times. She took me out into the town and had a meal, things like that. Parents could come at the weekend and there was considerable flexibility to get home.
62. I seem to remember there were a couple of inspections because I remember being told as a group to sit still and behave when they were there. I don't remember any senior religious figures visiting the school.

Sibling contact

63. My brother came to the school in his fifth year. Boys were not encouraged to mix between years even with siblings. I didn't really have much to do with my brother. I didn't see him or spend time with him. There was no opportunity to have contact with him. For all intents and purposes he might well not have been my brother. There was no encouragement for any contact between us.

Personal possessions

64. I got pocket money at St Joseph's but only when my parents sent it. There was a tuck shop where you could buy sweets.

Discipline

65. Discipline was normally getting hit with a leather belt. Sometimes you may be given lines to write out over and over. Fairly regularly there would be a mass punishment. This would be if someone had done something but didn't own up to it. The teacher would threaten that if the person responsible didn't own up, the whole class would be belted. One time I was in the recreation hall and something happened but I can't remember what it was. The Marist Brother, I can't remember who, came in and lined us up. There was about twenty of us. No one would own up so he started belting every one of us on the hand. When it got to me I refused to be belted and I told him it wasn't me. He said it didn't matter everyone was getting belted. I refused. He didn't take it any further and just let me go.
66. I remember on one occasion I was to get the belt from my primary seven teacher. I can't remember who her name. She didn't have a belt so I was sent to Miss Sweeney, the primary six teacher, who was quite a formidable character, to borrow hers. She was a lay teacher. I went into her classroom, which was full of younger children, and asked her for her belt. She would have heard what I said but asked me to say it again louder, probably so the whole class would hear and to make an example of me. This was quite humiliating and embarrassing in front of these younger children. I went back and I was given the belt in front of the class, then had to return the belt to Miss Sweeney.
67. Punishment for serious crime was usually meted out by the gym teacher. He was a lay teacher and he came from Fort William. His name was Mr Craig and the children knew him as 'Biff' Craig. He was a big guy. Anyone caught shoplifting or something like that and brought back to the school would be dealt with by him. The headmaster would refer you to him. Biff would give you six of the belt on the hand and you would definitely know that you had been belted. I was never belted by him but I know a couple of boys who were. I can't remember their names.

68. There were prefects who were bullies. I think they were bullies before they became prefects. I didn't really see any prefects exerting their authority on any of the boys or issuing any physical punishment.
69. The Marist Brothers would occasionally do locker inspections. Our lockers weren't locked. Shoes not being worn had to be polished. Clothes had to be folded neatly. Sometimes you would be given some warning of an inspection so you had a chance to get it sorted. At other times it was a spot inspection. If the Marist Brothers weren't happy you might get lines, detention or extra work to do. This was just really for juniors.
70. I am not aware of any of the punishments that were given to me ever being recorded anywhere. I was never a cheeky or ill-disciplined child so I was only ever belted on the odd occasion.

Bed Wetting

71. I am not aware of any issues involving bed wetting when I was at St Joseph's.

Abuse at St Joseph's College

72. It was well known that some of the Brothers at St Joseph's liked a drink. There was a locked store cupboard where they kept their booze. One time some of the boys broke into it and stole their booze. This created quite an issue. It didn't affect me.
73. I think life at St Joseph's was emotionally easier than St Columba's probably because I was older and had been at St Columba's and knew what to expect. I also had a couple of friends who were there too. Because St Joseph's was much bigger, it was harder for the Marist Brother to manage the larger number of boys. This meant there was more scope for doing your own thing. I wasn't bullied by my peers and I believe that was because I smoked and drank alcohol and gave me credibility.

74. Brother CIPHER WI who was one of the dorm masters at St Joseph's when I started was a notorious drinker. He often smelled of alcohol and you could tell from his behaviour that he was drunk. If you got up to go to the toilet within thirty minutes of going to bed, and if he caught you, he might give you the belt on your hands. I did see him lose his temper. He had one glass eye and his other eye wasn't very good. When he gave you the belt there were ways of minimising the pain. You could either cup your hands or hold your hand higher. Sometimes Brother CIPHER WI would miss with the belt and hit his sutan so didn't know if he had hit you. He would often ask if he had hit you.
75. I was belted at some point by Brother MMK who was the SNR at the time. I can't remember what I had done but I was sent to his office. I remember he had a secretary so I told her why I was there. There was a traffic light system and you had to wait until it was green before you were allowed to enter his room. He gave me a telling off then belted me once on my hand. I never really did anything that was considered to be very serious so any punishment I received was relative to what I had been caught for. Sometimes I was caught talking in class repeatedly.
76. When we were older and were allowed tape cassette players in the dorm we weren't allowed to keep them in the dorm. We had to give them to the dorm master for safe keeping. When we went to our dorms in the evening we had to go into his room and ask for it. One time, when I was about fourteen, I went to get the cassette player and it was a stand-in dorm master as the usual Brother was away for some reason. The stand-in was either Brother Damien or Brother Daniel. This brother had a bit of a reputation and was given the nickname of the 'wanker'. He got this nickname because in the class he often was seen to walk up and down looking at boys work over their shoulders. He used to have his hands under his sutan and he was fumbling at his groin area as if he was playing with himself.
77. I went into his room and picked up the cassette player and when I was standing up I looked over at the Brother. He was wearing his sutan which had a big open pocket. He had his penis in his hand and was masturbating. I quickly left his room. He must have known I was there. Nothing was said between us.

78. I was never aware of any boy at St Joseph's being 'groomed' by any of the Marist Brothers. I was never offered any cigarettes or alcohol by any of them or shown any form of favouritism.

Reporting of abuse at St Joseph's

79. There wasn't really anyone at St Josephs who I could have gone to and told I wasn't happy. Nominally it should really have been the dorm or house master. I could also have gone to see the priest but I still saw him as part of the establishment.

Leaving St Joseph's

80. I left after I did my O levels, when I was sixteen, in 1976. By that time my father had stopped working abroad and was back in Edinburgh. The company he worked for had stopped paying my school fees and my dad couldn't afford it so asked if I wanted to go to Craigmount High School.

Life after boarding school

81. I went to Craigmount High School in Edinburgh for the last two years of my school education. It was a revelation to go there. I had freedom and was introduced to girls too. In fifth year I passed enough exams to get an unconditional offer to go to college at the end of sixth year. This meant I didn't need to study in my sixth year and I could party and go the pub when I wanted. After school I went to college but this was a disaster for me. I got a grant and sub-let a flat with my friend. I had this pot of money and no one was there to force me to go to the classes. I spent far too much time in the pub, started smoking a bit of dope and basically failed my first year and dropped out.
82. I went to work for a couple of years doing various jobs, working as a postman, in a supermarket and in factories. At the end of those two years I felt I was going nowhere

so decided to go back to college. At nineteen, when I realised the pleasure and benefits of education, on my terms, I embraced it. I qualified from college with an HND in biology. I then did lab technician work. I have a degree and several post grad qualifications. I have become a lifelong learner and am still studying now. I have been involved in research and taught in colleges. I currently work for the local authority as a commercial manager and am also a qualified electrician so my weekends are often filled doing this kind of work. I am training to be a bereavement counsellor and do voluntary work for a national charity for bereaved people.

83. Along the way I met a woman who was to become my first wife. This marriage lasted seven years. I remarried in 1994. I now have four children.

Impact

84. Before I went to boarding school I was living with my parents. Whilst we were not a particularly affectionate 'huggy' family, I don't recall ever seeing my parents lose their temper and they weren't strict. They were both very tolerant, committed and created a loving family. My mum smacked me a few times but I was never hurt. I was threatened that my father would "see me" when he got home from work but he never hit me. I went from this loving, nurturing environment to an austere authoritative regime where strange men dressed in strange clothes. There were lots of 'must do's' and 'can't do's' and this was difficult for me to get used to. This was a real culture shock to me. There was no love shown to me at all. I never felt any of the Marist Brothers had any affection or feelings for me. I had no feelings for them. I don't believe that anyone deserves automatic respect and it has to be earned. They did nothing to earn that.
85. When I was at St Columba's I had a nightmare. The nightmare consisted of a room full of cots containing babies. A man came into this room and he had very wrinkly weathered skin. He was an evil presence and it all felt very emotional. He put his wrinkly hands with no finger nails in the cot and started to lift the baby up from the cot. That was when I woke up and I was terrified. I felt there was a threat to this baby. My counsellor said this probably related to my feelings at the time of insecurity. We came

to the conclusion that it was an indication that at the time I felt almost powerless in such an oppressive regime. It was the juxtaposition between the innocence of the babies and the malevolent figure of the man which was probably in my mind at the time. It was probably more a reaction to my feelings of general anxiety and oppression within the institution.

86. I recall vividly one particular flight when I was heading back to St Columba's College from Africa. I can't remember what age I was but I didn't want to go back to boarding school. I was very upset and I locked myself in the toilet and was crying. The air hostess kept asking if I was alright, and eventually she told me I had to come out because we were going to land. I am not sure why I was like that at this time.
87. I started drinking alcohol at fifteen along with other boys when I was at St Joseph's and I have no doubt this later led me into having problems with alcohol later on in life. I enjoyed the feeling of intoxication. I liked it throughout my early adulthood until it became a problem for me and I had to stop. There was a buzz from the alcohol and I liked the effect. Other boys were doing the same as me. I knew that the Marist Brothers were drinking, my family used to drink, so drinking was a cultural norm for me. I cannot say that the boarding school experience caused me to drink but St Joseph's facilitated it. Had I been at home with my parents I wouldn't have been able to drink as easily and get away with it.
88. My alcohol abuse developed for several reasons. Because, as a young man, I had social anxieties and didn't thrive in group situations I used alcohol as a very handy tool to lower my inhibitions and fit in. My drinking became very bad and after I got married I drove home and when I got up in the morning the car was damaged but I couldn't remember what I had hit. I have no memories of some of my car journeys whatsoever. Several times I ran the car off the road. There are several periods of my life that I have no recollection of because I was in periods of blackout through alcohol. I eventually stopped drinking in 1998 with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous. My wife gave me the ultimatum to either give up drink or our marriage was over. Bizarrely my wife told me that when I gave up alcohol I became boring. Apparently I wasn't as much fun as I was when I had been drinking. Alcohol made me a different person, but it took over my life.

I started to become paranoid and started to depend on alcohol and made me feel suicidal. On a couple of occasions I attempted suicide. I cannot say if boarding school caused me to turn out like that.

89. Looking back now I can see that the Marist Brothers had very strong disciplinary measures. I believe that they were scared of losing control. The eight years of my life at boarding school was a negative experience for me. It was an authoritarian regime and to survive I had to develop survival mechanisms. I didn't do particularly well at school. I was never motivated or felt inspired by any of my teachers.
90. Towards the end of the marriage to my first wife we were having difficulties and went to marriage counselling. One of the things my wife said in counselling and has remained with me was that although we had been together for ten years and married for seven of those, she still didn't know me. She felt she could get to a certain point but I wouldn't open up and let her completely into my life. This shows that I am very self-contained. For the last five years of my second, and current, marriage I would describe as a marriage of convenience. We don't sleep in the same bedroom and there is no closeness between us. Her perception is that I haven't been there to support her. She, as did my previous wife, felt that I was wound up in myself and we weren't a unit. I have discussed this with a counsellor and the idea of survival mechanisms which I used at boarding school to stop myself from becoming more vulnerable, has carried on into my adult life and has put a hard shell around me which prevents people from getting close. I think this is to stop people from hurting me. I think this safety mechanism probably has been a contributory factor in the failure of my two marriages.
91. I am very focussed on being self-reliant. I feel I need to have a wide range of skills to survive in this world and never want to rely on other people. I am very suspicious of people who claim to be experts or people who are in positions of authority. I always wonder how they managed to get to that position and what are their motives or their real agenda.

92. Generally speaking I find it difficult to commit to anything. I don't join clubs or societies. I would be prepared to accept an invitation to be in a position of authority but only for a set period of time, for a certain aim to achieve an objective. I wouldn't want to be in a club just to be in club. I am not interested in the social aspect of clubs or to have interaction with people. I hate small talk with people who I don't know. I don't know if this is because I am suspicious of people or because I am suspicious of peoples motives.
93. I don't believe that the incidents at St Columba's and St Joseph's where my bottom was nipped and I saw the brother masturbating were hugely consequential or have been a contributory factor on the impact on my life. The authoritarian experience of boarding school did not suit my kind of personality. Some people might thrive on it but I didn't.

Treatment / support

94. I have had counselling in relation to my marriage and also in relation to my alcohol abuse. I didn't find the alcohol counselling of any use to me. The recovery programme used by Alcoholics Anonymous worked for me. Because I was training to be a counsellor, as part of the process, I had to undergo some counselling myself. In a counselling session I was asked to consider a number of behaviours in a list. I matched with ninety per cent of the criteria that identified a syndrome known as boarding school syndrome. I am still undergoing counselling.

Reporting of Abuse

95. I have never formally reported anything to the police from my time at St Columba's college or St Joseph's college.

Records

96. I have never sought any records from either of the boarding schools.

Lessons to be Learned

97. I hope that the Inquiry exposes the level of abuse that took place. Only by exposing it can it be addressed. I would like some analysis to be made of the other issues about bringing children up in an authoritarian regime and how that impacted on them. I think people should understand that the regime has possibly had more of an effect than individual incidents of sexual abuse. I would also like to see support in place for those who need it.
98. Children should not be placed into an authoritarian regime where they have to quickly learn survival mechanisms which they then carry forward into their adult psychology. They should be placed in a compassionate, nurturing environment and have access to parental love on a regular basis. This is likely to prevent issues later on in adult life.
99. I would like a public acknowledgement from the authorities that they failed, not only in their duty of care to children, but in their inability to manage their representatives, and what they are going to do about it in the future. By authorities I mean both the Catholic church and government departments who are responsible for education. All levels of the hierarchal structure must acknowledge their failings and that people have been damaged. They must take responsibility and give an active and demonstrable commitment to a process to show they have learned from their mistakes and put systems in place to stop it from happening again. This has to be a transparent and on-going process.
100. It would also be good if some people, who really need it, are given some form of help or compensation or if they need it counselling.

101. There is no doubt that when a person is put into a position of power that there is a danger that person will abuse that power to the detriment of the person they have the power over. There is truth in the saying 'Absolute power corrupts absolutely'. It is crucial that there is scrutiny, and checks and balances in place to prevent this. There must be transparency and regular challenges made. One of my mantras in life is to always examine motives for my actions. If this isn't done regimes are developed for the power holders benefit rather than the person who doesn't have the power.
102. There is a problem with religious ideology. I am now an atheist and don't profess any belief but respect other people's right to have religious beliefs if they wish, on the caveat that it does no harm to anyone else. The problem with any doctrine, religious or political, is that it is often predicated on a set of agreed rules rather than continuous rational appraisal. Rules and regulations are put in place and justification is pre-agreed as to why things must happen in a certain way. Challenge isn't encouraged because the system isn't set up to be challenged. Challenge is often seen as aggressive and negative, and sometimes as overstepping the mark. I believe I am now atheist for a number of reasons. Partly it is because I consider myself to have a logical rational look on life and look for evidence based explanations for a phenomenon. There isn't one for religious ideology because it is faith based. The other part is because I have a very low tolerance to hypocrisy and I see the conduct of the Catholic church in relation to child abuse and also the behaviour I saw of the Marist Brothers as a degree of hypocrisy.
103. I can see the benefit of religion to many people in terms of giving them a purpose in life, community interaction, a sense of solace and loss in death. On the other hand there is a risk that if you accept this hierarchal system and authority figures as being inherently good then how can you challenge them. In some ways religion can be a dangerous thing to have if it isn't properly challenged and monitored in a proactive and constructive way.

Other information

104. Brother MFN died around 1976. I know this because he was buried at the cemetery for Marist Brothers within St Joseph's. They identified me as being one of Brother MFN pupils from St Columba's so I ended up being part of the procession behind the coffin at his funeral.
105. I went back to St Columba's college about twenty years ago when I happened to be in the Largs area. Houses had been built round a big tree on the front lawn. I had no feelings of sorrow that it had been demolished. I didn't really have any really emotional feelings. I went down on to the beach and that was more nostalgic for me.
106. 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.....

MKW

21 MARCH 2019