

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MEB

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is MEB. My date of birth is 1940. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I don't really remember family life before going into care. All I know is that we stayed in Dumfries. My mother's name was [REDACTED], but she died when I was an infant. My father's name was [REDACTED]. I have three brothers [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I also have a sister, [REDACTED] who we call [REDACTED]. I have been told that I also had another two sisters but they died when they were very young.
3. My father was an alcoholic. After my mother died I can only imagine that he didn't have the ways or means to look after us. I think that probably the local authorities stepped in and we were put into care.
4. My sister went to one orphanage. My three brothers and me went to Secondary Institutions - to be public. I have been told that this was because my grandmother was embarrassed. She didn't want us at a home in Dumfries. I think that I was either two or three years old when I went into the orphanage. At that time [REDACTED] was eight, [REDACTED] was five and [REDACTED] was four.

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Secondary Institutions - to be published later



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69. I think it was Mr MEE who first spoke to me about going to Australia. I was around thirteen years old when it was first mentioned although I didn't leave until I was fifteen. He asked me if I wanted to join my brother in Australia and I said yes. had already been there for three years. I don't recall anything about the time he left other than saying goodbye to him. It was a very sad time as that left me in the home on my own. I had no contact with after he went to Australia.

70. I had no knowledge of Australia or where I was going. I was aware I had to go there, work hard and keep my head down.

Migration to Australia

Consent

71. I don't remember being asked to sign any forms about going to Australia. I believe that my father did sign a consent form for me to go.

Medical checks

72. I am assuming that I would have had a medical before leaving. I don't remember this it's just something that I think would have happened.

Preparation

73. There was no preparation for leaving. The day before I left I was told that I was going on a bus in the morning. That night I stayed with my grandmother and grandfather. My father came to see me. All remember was him singing, "Bye Bye Blackbird".
74. When I left the home I had very few possessions. I had what I was wearing and some other clothing in a small blue suitcase. I knew that I was going to Australia to work on a farm.

Transportation

75. I was given £10 and put on a bus to Edinburgh. I then travelled on a train alone to London and went to the YMCA. I have no idea how I managed to get there. At the YMCA there were twelve of us altogether waiting to travel to Australia. I didn't know any of the others but they were all Scottish. In the morning a minister of the church came and took us all to Tilbury. I don't know the minister's name. I don't remember having any papers with me or handing these to anyone. It might have been that the minister had these.
76. We sailed from Tilbury to Australia on the SS Strathnaver. After this we never saw the minister again. On the ship I became very sick due to a lack of salt. I was in the ship's hospital for about a week and given salt tablets. I think I recovered pretty quickly and the rest of the journey was very good.

77. We were given real food. We had absolute freedom on the ship. We could run around and do what we wanted to. The ship docked in Perth and we were taken on a trip by train to a national park for a visit.
78. After this the ship travelled to Melbourne. I was met by Superintendent ^{AIP} [REDACTED] when I got off the ship. I was the only one that went with Mr ^{AIP} [REDACTED]. He took me in a 4 x 4 car to Dhurringile Rural Training Farm in Tatura, Victoria.

Dhurringile Rural Training Farm, Tatura, Victoria

79. I was only at Dhurringile for seven or eight days. When I migrated I was actually too old for the scheme. I think I was allowed to go because my brother was already there.
80. Dhurringile was very good. You were very well fed. There were proper meals. The staff were all good. I don't have any complaints about that place.
81. After Dhurringile I moved to the Katandra area where I had to work on farms for the next two years.
82. At Katandra I worked on the farm for [REDACTED] I would work from six thirty in the morning until ten at night. On a Sunday I had the day off although I still had to milk the cows in the morning and at night.
83. I was paid £6 per week and from that I paid £1 for board. I was allowed to keep part for pocket money and the rest they banked for me. I still had access to this money.

Additional farms

84. All the farms I worked on were next to each other on the same road. I think I worked on five farms altogether. I was treated well at them all even though I wasn't keen on farming.
85. After two years I started to work on the roads before joining the Australian Navy when I was nineteen. I now know through using freedom of information that there were people who had responsibility for me whilst I was working on the farms. I didn't know this at the time.

Sibling contact

86. [REDACTED] didn't know where I was but I knew where he was. I was able to make contact with him.
87. When I was in Australia I had difficulty speaking with [REDACTED]. I would ring him up but I couldn't speak and hung up. This went on for years until I was sixty years old. I think that this shows you how much things at Levenhall had affected my head.

Impact

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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91. I approached the church as an adult. When the Inquiry in England was about to start I wrote a brief note to Margaret Humphries of the Child Migrants Trust about what had happened to me. She was the one that had who had brought the child migrant topic up. I had no good words to say. I've not raised it officially with any other officials. I didn't receive any response to my correspondence.

Records

92. I have never tried to recover my care records. I did receive my records from my time as a child when I arrived in Australia. This was through a freedom of information request. I didn't have any problem recovering these records.
93. There were letters saying that I was a good boy when I was working on the farm. There was also letters from Church of Scotland to the authorities in Australia. I hadn't seen these before.

94. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Lessons to be Learned

95. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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97. I think as a child migrant we take comfort in what we have and what we got.

Other information*Family restoration fund*

98. I'm not sure how I found out about the family restoration fund but I thought that I could use it, which I have.

Nationality

99. I was called a "£10 Pom" in Australia but I would retaliate with "get the chains off your leg". Since I was eighteen I always voted in Australia although I didn't become an Australian citizen until I was in my fifties. I have never held a British passport.
100. There was an application process to become an Australian citizen. This was pretty straightforward. I never had any problems with health care. I have a gold card as a result of being in the navy. This provides me with my healthcare.

Counselling

101. I have never been for counselling. I think it's a bit late for that. I have all the support I need from my family.

Hopes for the Inquiry

102. I hope that as a result of what is being looked at it will help children who are still in care. I am glad that I have had the chance to say what I have needed to say. It's been good to have had an opportunity to tell my story.
103. 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.

MEB

Signed.....

Dated... 14-9-2018