

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MDK [REDACTED]

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is MDK [REDACTED] My surname when I was born was family name [REDACTED] My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1938 and I am presently eighty years of age. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

General

2. I was really young when I was put into care at the Good Shepherd Convent at Colinton in Edinburgh. I was there until I was nine years old when I was sent to Australia as a child migrant. In Australia I was put into St Joseph's Orphanage at Subiaco in Perth and I was there until I was eighteen years old.

Life before going into care

3. My mother was [REDACTED] and my father was [REDACTED]. He died in 1941 when he was thirty-five years old. I can't remember my childhood before I went into care. I certainly have no recollection of a loving mother or father or anything like that. I don't even know what age I was when I went into care.
4. My mother had nine children in total, although I thought I was one of five until I went back to Scotland in 1997.
5. Her first child died and then there was [REDACTED] then [REDACTED] and then there was my brother MEF [REDACTED] or MEF [REDACTED] as he's known. [REDACTED] and MEF [REDACTED] also came out to Australia

as child migrants. After ^{MEF} there was me and then there were twins, but they died too.

6. After the twins there was ^{MZW} who is five years younger than me. I didn't even know I had a sister ^{MZW} until I'd been in Australia for a few years and I was told she was coming too. After ^{MZW} there was another girl, ^{MEF}, who was born the year I came out to Australia. I've never met her.

Life in care - Scotland

Woodfield Children's Home, Colinton, Edinburgh

7. I knew the home in Edinburgh as the Good Shepherd Convent, although I believe it was actually called Woodfield Children's Home. It was run by the Good Shepherd Sisters and was at Colinton in Edinburgh. The children were all girls and it wasn't a big concern, there weren't a lot of us.
8. My older sister ^{MEF} was in there with me and not long before I went to Australia ^{MZW} came in as well. I'm not sure what happened to ^{MEF} my oldest sister. At that time I didn't even know ^{MZW} was my sister or that I had a brother ^{MEF}.
9. I'm really vague about my life there. All I really remember is that we had to get a bus to school, which was outside the convent somewhere. Otherwise we were pretty much locked in. I can also remember playing with the other girls when we weren't at school, but not much else.
10. I do recollect that my older sister ^{MEF} had a very bad accident. She had been walking up the stairs with a bowl of boiling water when she tripped and the water went all over her. When I asked the nun where ^{MEF} had gone she told me that she was in the hospital and she thought she was going to die.
11. I think my mother came to see us, because I remember meeting my grandparents, her mum and dad. I've got a photo of them.

12. The nuns were pretty strict but I found them a lot better than the nuns that looked after me in Australia. I certainly don't remember getting whacked there. Maybe because we were younger we looked on them as mums.

Migration

Selection/information

13. I think I was about eight when they started making arrangements to bring us out to Australia. We were all asked as a group who wanted to go to Australia. I think we nearly all put our hands up. I just thought I was going somewhere for a holiday.

Migration Form

14. I have a copy of my migration form. It is dated [REDACTED] 1947. My mother signed my form and it is witnessed by Rev. P. Quille. Mum virtually gave me away. I have passed a copy of this form to the Inquiry.

Leaving Scotland

15. We were all vaccinated for smallpox and I still have the scars from the injection on my arm. I think they must have done some sort of medical examination as well, because on the migration form it mentions things like my throat was clear. I don't remember getting any examination or health tests though.
16. We were put on a train to Southampton carrying little brown cases with a few clothes in them and that was it. I never saw Mum before I left.
17. When we arrived in Southampton we were all put in a room because we were a bit early. We were kept there until we could board the boat, the 'Ormonde'. There were only seven girls in my group, including [REDACTED] and me, the rest were boys.

Journey on RMS Ormonde

18. We were looked after on the boat by a Mrs O'Neill. I think she and her husband and their two girls, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were going to Australia to live.
19. It was on the boat that I found out I had a brother, MEF [REDACTED]. We girls mixed together with the boys from Scotland and one of the boys told me that there was a family name [REDACTED] with them. That's when I met MEF [REDACTED] for the first time.
20. We weren't allowed off the boat at any time and I remember a couple of the other passengers died on the journey and were buried at sea. I also remember they used to show us a lot of movies about Australia. We saw sheep, kangaroos and black men who had spears. I asked Mrs O'Neill how long we were going to be there before we looked like that.

Arrival in Australia

21. I have been shown a copy of the passenger list for the Ormonde from the Australian National Archives, which says that we arrived in the port of Fremantle, Western Australia (WA) on [REDACTED] 1947. That is correct.
22. I have been shown another file from the Australian National Archives, which lists all the children and where they are going. All the girls that came with me from the Good Shepherd in Colinton are listed there. They were [REDACTED], my sister [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and LYF [REDACTED]. There was also [REDACTED] who came from another convent. The file shows that we were all to go to St Joseph's Orphanage in Subiaco, which is correct.
23. The file also shows details about my brother MEF [REDACTED] who was going to Bindoon. By that time I had only known MEF [REDACTED] for a month and that was him being taken off to Bindoon. We didn't catch up again till he was eighteen.

24. It was about forty-degrees when we arrived at Fremantle and yet we all had our hats and coats on. Everything was taken off us, including our little brown cases. I'm sure we got fingerprinted while we were there as well.
25. I know we arrived before lunch because the 'wharfies' had put on food for us in the wool sheds. We all went in to eat it, but there were ants all over the food and we couldn't. We weren't there long before MEF was put on the back of a truck and we were taken up to St Joseph's. I was calling after him not to go.
26. I think we went in two cars to St Joseph's along with a couple of nuns and the Minister for Migration. I don't know how long it took us, I was more interested in looking where we were going.

Life in care - Australia

St Joseph's Orphanage, Subiaco

General

27. St Joseph's Orphanage was run by the Sisters of Mercy. They had no mercy. There were about four nuns that were nice, the rest were not.
28. The orphanage was right in the middle of suburbia with houses all around it. It was a huge place with lots of vacant land round the back. In our part it was strictly girls, probably about three hundred on average. There was also a foundling home that had boys and girls in it up to the age of five. Once the boys were five they went to Castledare.
29. There were what were called senior girls who helped out in the kitchen and had their own jobs to do. They stayed in a separate place at night. There was also an old man who was the chauffeur and used to do odd jobs as well. Otherwise it was strictly nuns looking after us, probably about twenty of them.

30. The Reverend Mother in charge was called Mother LYB and of the other nuns there were Sister MEH Sister LYC Sister MEI and Sister MDS

31. A couple of days after we arrived we were told by the nuns that we had no family. No mother and no father. We just had to live with that belief.

First day at institution

32. I remember we were given lunch when we first arrived at St Joseph's and there were beautiful tablecloths on the tables. With there only being seven of us it was lovely.

33. There was a big Irish Setter dog called Brucie-Brown that belonged to St Joseph's and it came in barking at us as we ate. I ended up on the table with the nuns trying to pull me down while [REDACTED] was telling them I was scared of dogs.

34. That was my introduction to St Joseph's. From then on we just got on with our lives, answering to bells and commands. They taught us how to work and they taught us how to pray, but that was about it.

35. We were all given a number, although we were never called by that number. All our clothes were marked with our number and mine was [REDACTED]. A lot of the nuns would just call us by our surnames and after a little while I got called MDK [REDACTED] although I don't know why. I probably gave a bit of cheek, but no more than that. It was maybe just because it rhymed.

Daily Routine

36. We slept in a big dormitory with a balcony outside and a room attached where a nun slept. We called it her cell. The nun that looked after us was called Sister MEH [REDACTED]. She was alright with me because I was her pet, but she could be cruel.

37. There were about seventy-five or eighty girls in our dorm as well as some girls sleeping on the balcony and some in a smaller dormitory upstairs called the Sacred Heart.

38. We were up at six o'clock in the morning and immediately on our knees praying. Then we'd get dressed, then work and then go to church. After that we had breakfast and after breakfast we'd do whatever other work needed to be done. Then we had school.
39. After school we had some leisure time before the evening meal and then we had night church and then homework. There was no help with homework, we just had to sit in the school and do it ourselves.
40. After homework we went to bed, but before we got in our beds, we had to do the toilet in a row of buckets. I don't know who emptied the buckets. While we were doing that a couple of the senior girls would be standing there. There was no privacy.
41. The doors were locked at night and we'd say our prayers at the side of our beds before we got in. Once we were in bed we couldn't move. Sister MEH walked up and down the dormitory and if we moved she would hit us with her strap. You could have been scratching yourself or anything. Their thoughts were that if we were moving we were being improper.

Mealtimes

42. All meals were served in the dining room, except for morning tea and afternoon tea. The meals were terrible. I used to get belted for not eating them. For breakfast we got what was supposed to be porridge, but which was semolina, or sago or something. We used to call it "frogs eyes". It was disgusting. We also would get a cup of tea, but it was what the nuns had left over and it had been brewing for a couple of days. Lunch was just a sandwich and dinner was just as bad.
43. For morning tea we were given little bottles of milk that had been sitting out in the sun for four hours. I threw mine up so I told the nun I was allergic. Afternoon tea was a piece of bread with golden syrup on it, which we ate in the playground.

44. If you didn't eat you had to sit there when everyone else had finished and you'd get hit by one of the nuns. Sometimes I used to take a paper bag in with me and put my food in that. Sometimes the dog, Brucie-Brown, got it under the table.

Washing and bathing/Hygiene

45. We had one shower a week. Other than that we had to wash at a set of basins. We'd wash our hands and face and then the nun would turn the light off so we could wash the rest in private.
46. There were no toothbrushes, I didn't clean my teeth till I went to work at the age of sixteen.

Clothing

47. We were given one pair of knickers a week to wear. We never had shoes unless we were going out to a funeral or the church. We wore ordinary clothes most of the time, although we wore uniforms if we were going anywhere.

Leisure time

48. Leisure time was spent outdoors where there was a big playground with swings in it. We made our own fun. There were no toys or games or anything.

Trips and holidays

49. The only trips out we had were twice a year at Christmas and on St Patrick's Day. At Christmas we'd go into the city to the movies, which I think was paid for by the council. On St Patrick's Day we'd go to one of the big ovals in Perth where the Bishop would say the Mass to all the Catholic schools. We'd all have our uniforms on then.

Schooling

50. Schooling was done in the orphanage. The classes they had were first and second standard, as it was at that time, then third and fourth standard, up to sixth standard. We'd already done some schooling in Scotland but they still put us into first and second standard.
51. We knew how to read and write, we were nine years old. We kept telling them that we'd already done the work and they eventually put us up to third and fourth standard.
52. One of the things we had to do while we were at school was write letters to our families. I don't know what happened to them. I don't think they ever went anywhere. The nuns also got an elocution lady in to teach us to speak English so that we never had an accent when we left.
53. Usually the final year was sixth standard, but I was lucky and went up to seventh standard. I was fourteen when I finished schooling.

Healthcare

54. The nuns told us that our periods was us getting punished by God. We were never given any of the proper stuff, it was horrible what we had to use. All we had was a piece of elastic, two pins and some material that we had to wash ourselves by hand.
55. There was an infirmary there and when there was an outbreak of polio we got injections. Even so, a couple of the girls still got polio. I got mumps one time so I was put in a little room so that nobody else would catch them. Later on I developed asthma, which the doctor thought had been brought on by nerves.
56. We just put up with any injuries we might have got. If we were sick, all we would get would be a cup of castor oil and that was it.

Work

57. Work consisted of waxing and polishing the floors on our hands and knees. Some girls also went to the laundry and some went to the kitchen. We were spread around but I was mainly polishing floors.
58. There were a lot of olive trees in the grounds and another job for us was to pick the olives. If we filled up a four gallon tin we got sixpence. We used to get fed up and half fill the tin with sand and then cover the sand with olives. The old man that did the driving would make olive oil with them. You could hear him screaming in rage when he discovered the sand in his machine.

Christmas and Birthdays

59. Every year, early in December, we were taken to the movies in Perth. As we went into the cinema we'd get a bit of Christmas cake and a bucket of ice cream.
60. On Christmas Eve, we'd all gather to sing Christmas carols at 11:00 o'clock at night. Then we'd have midnight Mass, which was lovely. When we got back to our dormitories they'd give us a cup of cocoa and a biscuit and there would be a wrapped gift on the end of every bed. We were allowed to open them and see what was inside, but then we had to put them back. When we woke up in the morning all the gifts were gone.
61. Most of the gifts were clothes that had been donated. There were never toys or books. One year the gift I got was a horrible dress. I said to someone that it must have been meant for my grandmother. I think the nuns just got fun out of wrapping. We never got anything to keep or had any personal possessions at any time.

Visits and Inspections

62. My mother came out to Australia in 1953, when I was fourteen. She migrated out as one of the 'Ten Pound Poms', which was a Government-assisted scheme to encourage folk to migrate.

63. The Reverend Mother at St Joseph's got her a job at the Bishop's palace in Perth and then she got a job at the Christian Brothers college as a cook. Mum would come up now and again to see us, but then she met this man and that was it. He was a sleazy, horrible man. They moved a long way away and I never saw my mum after that.
64. [REDACTED] was fourteen when we arrived at St Joseph's and she left at sixteen to go to work. After she left she would come back and visit every couple of weeks.
65. Once a year someone from the Health Department came to St Joseph's. I remember that so well because we always got a beautiful lunch. They always seemed to come when we were all sitting eating our lunch. They never spoke to us, the nuns escorted them around. We never had to dress differently, we just wore our ordinary clothes.

Review of care/detention

66. I had a choice to go and live with my Mum when she moved out to Australia. I'm not sure whether she actually started to make arrangements with social workers or with the nuns. I didn't want to go though, I didn't know her.

Family

67. After I'd been at St Joseph's for a while, one of the nuns told me my sister was coming out as well. I didn't understand because I thought she was meaning my older sister [REDACTED]. It was then that I found out that I had a younger sister [REDACTED] MZW.
68. [REDACTED] MZW was supposed to be going to South Australia, but when [REDACTED] learned that, she insisted that [REDACTED] MZW come to St Joseph's instead. The Reverend Mother then arranged for that to happen.
69. We tended to stay in our age groups so I didn't see [REDACTED] MZW very much because she was five years younger. We didn't have much contact.

70. I was sixteen before I met MEF again. He was eighteen and had got a job as a shearer when he left Bindoon. He'd travel around and come and see us whenever he came to the city.

Emotional care/support

71. We would just talk to each other if we had any worries or concerns. We certainly could never speak to any of the nuns.

Bedwetting

72. It was sad what happened to girls that wet their beds. There was a balcony outside our dormitory with about ten beds on it where they had to sleep. We used to call it 'Lavender lane'. I think those girls only did it because they were scared. I don't know what happened to them if they did wet the bed.

Nature and frequency of abuse

73. The nuns were very harsh and cruel and life at St Joseph's was very military-like. We all suffered mental and physical abuse, but that was as far as it went.
74. They told us that we'd come from the slums and that we should be grateful we were in a better place now. Every nun carried a leather strap rolled up in their pocket. If we didn't eat our food we would get hit with that. If we weren't polishing the floors hard enough we'd get belted on the bottom of our feet with the strap. We were children and we would do naughty things, but I don't think the punishment was ever appropriate.
75. I remember one day in particular when I was struggling to eat a piece of meat, chewing away. One of the nuns came round and belted me across the back of the head with her strap because she thought I was talking. I got hit again for answering back when I said I wasn't talking.
76. If a nun questioned you and you answered back you'd get your ears boxed. That happened many a time.

77. The Reverend Mother, Mother LYB used a cane. I got caught pinching sugar once and got called up to see her. She whacked me twice with her cane for that.

Reporting of abuse

78. There was nobody to tell about the way the nuns were treating us. I've never reported anything to the police or anywhere else either.

Life after the institution

79. There was no preparation for leaving. I went out to work for the last two years I was living there. I couldn't even speak to people, I was too scared that they might find out where I was from.
80. My first job was with the Land and Surveys Department of the Government. I would take my pay home and give it to the nun in charge and she would give me the money for the bus. I just took it that my pay was my board and lodging at St Joseph's. I never got any of that pay back when I eventually left at eighteen.
81. When I did leave I went to stay with my sister [REDACTED] but it didn't work out. She took in quite a few of the girls from St Joseph's at different times. I packed my suitcase and went to work that day with nowhere to stay.
82. My boss took me to his mother's and I stayed there until she got sick. After that I moved into a room in Subiaco where I stayed until I got married.
83. Nobody from St Joseph's ever checked to see if I was okay or to give me any support at all.
84. I was twenty when I got married and I had to leave my job then. At that time you had to leave a Government job when you got married. We had three beautiful kids and I've now got three beautiful grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

85. The marriage was abusive and I left my husband in 1983. After that I started living a good life. I went back to work in 1969 when I got a factory job. In 1984 I got a job in the canteen of a television company where I was for ten years until they shut the building down. Then I got another job and I carried on working until I was seventy-six when I eventually retired.

Other action taken

86. I participated in the Redress WA scheme which was a scheme to provide redress to those who had been abused or neglected in the care of the State of Western Australia. Dr Philippa White of the organisation Tuart Place compiled a statement on my behalf. The statement was submitted in November 2008 and I have provided a copy of this statement to the Inquiry. I confirm that the facts stated in it are true.
87. I don't know why, but I only got half the payment from the Redress WA scheme that everyone else in my group got. I have not sought any other compensation and I have never raised the abuse I suffered with the Sisters of Mercy. There's none of them left now.

Campaigning/awareness raising/other organisations

88. I have been asked whether I recall providing a submission to the Health Committee of the U.K. Parliament, which was looking at child migration in the late 1990's, but I don't recall doing so.
89. Over the years, I have been involved with some child migrant organisations, however I don't remember specifically if I was a member of the Child Migrant Friendship Society of Western Australia.

90. I have been shown a transcript from 2001 of evidence that I apparently gave to the Community Affairs Reference Committee, the Senate Inquiry. I'm afraid I don't remember doing so.

91.



Treatment/support

92. I've never had any support or counselling regarding my time in care. If I've ever had any problems I have just asked Dr White from Tuart Place, she's very helpful and supportive. I think I'm too old for anything else.

Other matters relating to migration

93. In 1997 I went back to the U.K. with other former child migrants. We called the trip 'The Sentimental Journey' and it was paid for by the Sisters of Mercy.
94. [REDACTED] one of the girls from Ireland that was at St Joseph's, started off the Sentimental Journey. It was lovely. We all went back and forwards for meetings to explain what was going to happen. A lady called Maureen Colgan escorted about forty-seven of us back to the U.K. The only other Scottish migrant was LYF [REDACTED]
95. When we got to the airport there were media there along with the Premier of WA and the Archbishop. Everyone was getting interviewed by the press, although I never spoke to them.
96. When we finally arrived in the U.K. there were even more media there who took photos and spoke to a few of us.
97. My older sister [REDACTED] came to meet me and I had eight hours with her that day.

98. We stayed in England as a group for the first few days and went to different luncheons that were put on. Then we had to go to Ireland to visit the mother house of the Sisters of Mercy.
99. [REDACTED] lived in Surrey so after we'd done all that I went back and stayed with her and her husband [REDACTED]. I spent three weeks with them and it was lovely. She died two years later.

Records and family tracing

100. I have tried to get my records from the Sisters of Mercy and from St Joseph's, but their response every time is that there was a fire and the records don't exist anymore.
101. I only got a few pages from the WA State archives, which include my child migration form and a paper called 'Movements and Remarks'. It has a few entries about where I stayed and what I did after I left St Joseph's up to the time I got married.
102. Dr White wrote to the Good Shepherd in Edinburgh, but all they had was information about my baptism and that I wasn't confirmed.
103. There are lots of mistakes in the records I have managed to get. Some of them have my surname spelt wrongly, either [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. I also have some papers for my sister ^{MZW} [REDACTED] that record her birthday as the [REDACTED], when it should be the [REDACTED] of the month.
104. It's been difficult to form a relationship with my brother and sisters because we were all separated. ^{MZW} [REDACTED] and I now have a good relationship but it took a long time.
105. As far as I know, the first time I met my sister [REDACTED] was when I went back on the Sentimental Journey in 1997. I don't remember seeing her before.

106. I've tried to trace my youngest sister [REDACTED] but I can't find her. I have her birth certificate, but all I know is that she was adopted from St Katherine's Convent in Edinburgh when she was eight months old.
107. I have some first cousins in Livingston in Scotland. Our mothers are sisters. They contacted Tuart Place, who then put MZW [REDACTED] and I in touch with them. We still contact each other fairly regularly.

Nationality

108. Our biggest problem as child migrants was that we had no identity. When I left the orphanage I had nothing, not even my birth certificate.
109. When I was getting married the priest told me I needed to get permission and so I told him I was a ward of the state. He told me to go to the Immigration Department and speak to them. I spoke to the boss a Mr Young and he gave me my birth certificate. That was the first time I'd seen it.
110. When I stopped working for the television channel and was looking for another job, I applied for unemployment benefit. The lady asked for my passport, but I never had one. I was so angry. Luckily enough the next day I found a job.
111. I spoke to MZW [REDACTED] and we applied to get naturalised. We had to pay a fee and had to go through the process and I now have an Australian passport. I never even thought of getting a British one as well.
112. I didn't have a problem getting my pension because by that time I had a little bit more paperwork and I had a passport.

Impact

113. In my redress statement I mention my time in care and the impact that and my being migrated has had. I discuss my loss of faith, the impact on my life and how I have felt about myself. I felt I had gone from the orphanage into marriage only to be treated the same way. I was so used to getting whacked around in the orphanage, I didn't know any different when I left. I also discuss the periods of depression and anxiety I have suffered.
114. It was hard having no identification documents when I was a teenager and when I got married. Whenever I have to fill in any official documents, like for the doctor, I always find it upsetting being asked about parents. I just say I'm an orphan.

Final thoughts/Lessons to be learned

115. I think someone must be held responsible. There is no need for children to be migrated as we were.
116. My mother was only fifty-three when she died in Australia in 1963. She smoked like a chimney and drank like a fish. My older sister [REDACTED] died in 1994.
117. I hope the experiences I have had never happen to another child again. I feel my childhood has been lost, that's the sad part about it.
118. 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..... MDK [REDACTED]

Dated..... 6 - 12 - 2018