

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

BQA [REDACTED]

Support person present: No

1. My name is BQA [REDACTED] My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1977. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before attending boarding school

2. I was born in Guildford. My twin sister and I were born three months prematurely when my dad was working in the south of England. My dad is called [REDACTED] and mum is called [REDACTED]. My sister is called [REDACTED] and I have a brother called [REDACTED] who is two and a half years younger than us.
3. My dad dropped out of school at fifteen because he had pretty bad dyslexia and his teacher told him he was going to be a failure. He went on to do an apprenticeship at Ferranti's in Edinburgh and he was subsequently in the computer industry for his whole life. I think he wanted us all to go to good schools because he never had that opportunity.
4. As a young child I lived on [REDACTED] in Edinburgh and we moved to Perth when I was four. We spent six years at our local primary school, [REDACTED], but it was very small with fewer than twenty children in the whole school and there was only one teacher.
5. After that I attended a private school just outside Perth which was called Craigclowan. I think I was ten when I went to Craigclowan and I was there for either

two or three years before I went to Gordonstoun. I had to move on to secondary school from there as it was a preparatory school.

6. My brother also went to Craigclowan and my sister went to an all girls' day and boarding school called Kilgraston which was in Bridge of Earn. This was a ten minute drive from Craigclowan. My dad would drop us off and then go to work in Edinburgh.
7. At Craigclowan they still used the cane but Mr Beale, the headmaster, would call every parent and ask if he had permission to use it. My parents told me he had asked about whether he could use it on my brother and me. My parents consented to my brother being caned because he was a bit of a trouble maker but in relation to me they told him to call and check because something would have been terribly off if I needed to be caned.
8. My parents and I talked about Strathallan and I don't understand the decision making process which led them to send me to Gordonstoun because I was the most shy, awkward, sensitive child and in my opinion it made no sense to send that child to a boarding school. I had no voice then so whatever I attempted to communicate about whether it was a good decision seemed to fall on deaf ears or maybe my parents were just doing their best to find a school which was academically rigorous. I don't think I really had a choice.
9. School was my sole focus for my whole life but I don't think my parents had a clue about what I was about to get into and I think they completely underestimated what would happen to a child who had no voice at a school like Gordonstoun.
10. I sat the Common Entrance exam for entry to Gordonstoun and I am sure I visited before I started there although I have no recollection of it.

Gordonstoun School, Elgin

11. Gordonstoun was coeducational and there were six boys' boarding houses and five girls' boarding houses. I was in Bruce House and the house master was called Ben Goss. There was another boy called [REDACTED] who went to Craigclowan who was also in Bruce House. A lot of the boys in Bruce were confident, outgoing and athletic. They were probably better suited for a place like Gordonstoun.
12. Bruce was arguably the worst house in terms of infrastructure. It was just one floor. You went in through the entrance and the tuck shop was on the right. There was a main living area and the bedrooms and the studies were in the back. The first year I was at Gordonstoun was the last year that pupils lived there and in my second year we moved into a brand new house. The second house we were in was also known as Bruce House and it had two floors. I was on the second floor right next to the stairs. I would guess there were about sixty boys in Bruce House from age thirteen to age eighteen. I have no clue how many pupils were at Gordonstoun overall.
13. There was another house called Round Square. The other boarding houses were tucked around the back of Round Square. Bruce was the furthest from the refectory and the classrooms so it was the furthest up the driveway. I remember doing that walk for the first year in particular by myself pretty much every single day that I was there.
14. The main dining room was in the centre of campus and it was to the left of the main building which looked over the lawn. This is where all the administration and the classrooms were.

Routine at Gordonstoun School

Early memories

15. My dad took me to school on my first day. When we were little my dad had a company car which was a seven series BMW and I think my parents knew that if my

dad drove me in his car that it would somehow make the whole drive up there a little better. I don't remember a lot of words. I just remember being dropped off and wondering why on earth I was there. I knew I wouldn't see my parents for three or four weeks and I remember just being petrified because it wasn't in my personality to be confident in a new environment.

16. I remember crying in Ben's office pleading not to be there and I remember him giving me his green polka dot handkerchief because I was not in a great place. He was fairly compassionate. He was a nice man and never mean but in retrospect he turned a blind eye to everything he didn't want to see.
17. I had absolutely no self-confidence so I didn't know how to navigate any of it. Everyone else knew what they were doing and how to make friends but I had always been so shy so I didn't know how to. It wasn't that I didn't want to and the staff couldn't have cared less that I was on my own. Other than when your parents were there you were on your own. I have absolutely no recollection of there being any pastoral care.

Sleeping arrangements and routine

18. Five or six of us who were in third form shared a room and there was someone in fifth form who was in charge of the room. He was called [REDACTED] and I think he slept in the room along with us. In the morning someone ran around the house repeating "Wake up, morning run. Wake up morning run."
19. We always had to go on a run which was a painful way to start the day. This happened rain or shine. We got up around 6am and we had to run for ten minutes. We showered in communal showers, went to breakfast and from there to class.
20. We had study hall before bed time. There was a short break between study hall and bedtime and then the upperclassmen would walk around the house saying "Lights out." I think this was at 10pm but the older boys stayed up later.

Mealtimes / Food

21. You could go to breakfast by yourself as long as you were there in time. I remember eating cereal and yoghurt most mornings. The food was totally fine. I sat by myself and ate for the whole year and a half that I was at Gordonstoun. They had hot chocolate and baked goods at snack time and I used to drink gallons of hot chocolate because I loved it.

Washing / bathing

22. I think we showered every day but I never felt comfortable showering with everyone else so I would try to find a time during the day when other people weren't there. This sometimes meant skipping sports practice when they were all out. The showers were not supervised.

Clothing / uniform

23. One of the worst decisions I made was about the uniform. The only choice about what you had to wear was between a V neck sweater and a round neck sweater. The V-neck sweaters were much thinner and because it was so cold some people wore two V-neck sweaters. I thought they were silly for wearing their V- necks and I always chose to wear a round neck sweater. I got made fun of for that the entire time I was there because apparently it wasn't cool. I wasn't at peace with it but I always identified as different.
24. There was a jacket but I don't think we wore it to class. I think we chose between shorts and trousers and our shoes had to be always well shined. We had to get dressed up on a Sunday before church and I remember something about wearing a kilt. After school on Saturday we were allowed to wear our own clothes and I always looked forward to that.
25. You put all your laundry in a bag and dropped it off on a specified morning and it came back clean. Everything had to have your name on it so they sorted it that way.

School

26. The schooling was excellent. They had five different levels academically and the first year I was there I was in the top one and then they saw that I put an enormous amount of pressure on myself so they moved me to the second level for my fourth form. Other than the physics teacher I only have fond memories of the teachers. They were all fairly strict but I also remember them being good teachers. Some of them were old school but I didn't witness any physical punishment, quite the opposite. The teachers were strict but not punitive.
27. If as a group you did well academically you got a Saturday morning off so there was an incentive to work hard. In the classroom I was fine because it was safe and it was the only thing in life I felt confident about. There was an academic advisor and he would come and tell you your grades and you would talk about them.
28. I played sport after school, mainly rugby, but sport scared the living daylights out of me because everyone seemed faster and stronger. I remember trying to get out of some of the sports. As I got older I fell in love with lots of different activities but at the time sport was intimidating. A lot of the guys took out their aggression on the sports field so I tried to avoid it but I think it was just boys being boys.
29. Prefects wore a little purple thing on their sweater that designated them as such but I don't know what specifically they did. I don't remember them being anything other than nice.

Personal Possessions

30. You were allowed to have your own possessions and I had a cassette player with tapes. I also had a tuck box which you could lock and I kept these items in my study. In second year I had my own room which I could lock.

Chores

31. We had chores to do and I remember sweeping a lot. I tried to do a decent job because I was always so scared of doing the wrong thing.

Trips / Holidays

32. We definitely had trips because I remember biking and going to Lossiemouth to learn how to sail. I also remember learning all the knots.

Exeat Weekends

33. Every three or four weeks we could go home for a night because we had school on a Saturday morning. When I went home for exeats it was the same story every time. I didn't want to go back but I think either my parents had no idea what to do or they didn't care.

Contact with home

34. We were allowed a phone call once a week but I don't remember any other communication with my family. All of my phone calls with my parents were me pretending things were fine. I got no sense they wanted to understand what was actually going on. The underlying message was 'suck it up and figure out how to deal with it'. I don't know if my parents were in communication with the school separately.

Healthcare

35. There was an infirmary on campus where you went if you weren't feeling well and I remember going. I spent the night there a couple of times when I was sick.

Discipline

36. I remember people having to do lines but I was petrified of doing anything wrong so I never encountered or experienced anything like that.

Abuse at Gordonstoun School

Sexual abuse

37. I used to walk around the campus by myself. I listened to music a lot and I sometimes went to the music room where I listened to Dire Straits. I was a loner and I think the physics teacher, Andy Keir, picked up on that because he started inviting me to his house on Saturday afternoons. This happened during my first year at Gordonstoun. He always talked about model aeroplanes and I decided to go. My earliest memories of him were nothing but positive because he was always happy, although in hindsight maybe too happy. He was very nice and smiley and gentle. He was in his late thirties or early forties. He wore glasses and was balding. He was slightly overweight and not very tall. He was clean shaven.
38. Another student who also went to Craigclowan was called [REDACTED] His dad owned [REDACTED] shop in Perth. [REDACTED] and Andy Keir lived in Duffus House which was on the other side of campus. There were two main entrances to Gordonstoun, Bruce was closest to one and Duffus was closest to the other. I suspect [REDACTED] wondered why I was walking to his House and I think he asked me about it at some point. I have spent years thinking about all of this and I sometimes wonder if he or other people knew something was not right about this man.
39. In retrospect it was very strange that I would be invited to a teacher's house. I suspect he sensed that I was shy and a loner and I would be attracted by the prospect of having someone to talk to or interact with. It started off with what seemed to be a nice gesture. He took me to a room, which was not his room, and there was a bed. He said he was getting married or there was some reference to a woman in his

life and that he was going to use these oils on her as a relaxing thing to do. The gist of the conversation was that he had bought oils to use on what was going to be his new wife and he wanted to practice on me.

40. He asked me to take off my clothes and I remember lying on the bed wondering what was happening and why. He was putting his hands below my waist and it was so obvious at that point that this was all wrong. He touched me with his oiled hands, briefly, in a sexual way. I have no memory of him asking me to touch him sexually. I don't know what I said or what I did but I remember leaving at that point in a deep panic because I was so eager to get out of there. I have no clue where I went afterwards but after that moment I retreated way more inward than I had already done. I knew what had happened was wrong. I was naïve but not that naïve.
41. I felt very awkward going to class on the following Monday but Mr Keir was still very nice because he was probably afraid I was going to say something. My instinct was strong enough that I never went back to visit him. My gut tells me that he has probably done this with a lot of people because it seemed so calculated.

Bullying

42. I think I was probably a very difficult child because I don't think I knew how to do life and I think everyone sensed that and this is why I had the experience that I had at Gordonstoun. I was bullied almost every single day I was there. The fifth formers punched me, giving me a dead arm and they knee'd me in the thigh. I had bruises on my body for almost a year and a half. Part of the reason I showered by myself and I tried to avoid changing with others was so that my bruises would not be seen. It was awful. I think they knew I wouldn't do anything and I didn't. This was horrible stuff and no one cared.
43. The bullying was mainly done by one boy and I remember his name because he was one of the most despicable human beings I have ever met. He was called [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. I don't know if he was a prefect or had a title although he walked around as if he owned the place. He was a piece of work. There were other people who

weren't very nice but it was always [REDACTED]. There was another boy in my year who made fun of me. He had freckles but I don't remember his name.

44. I think [REDACTED] slept in our room because I remember having a cough and not being able to cough because you weren't allowed to make any noise in case you woke him up. You were petrified of coughing and I can't remember the number of times he sent me to sleep in my study where there was nowhere to sleep. I don't remember the other boys in my room having to do that. I didn't really sleep, I just sat there although I remember trying to sleep on the desk.
45. I think [REDACTED] knew that I hated who he was because he was such an asshole. I also don't think most people were as sensitive as me so he bullied me the entire time I was there. He made me hang onto the hot water pipes holding a knife to my genitals so that I couldn't drop. He did this on multiple instances. He forced my hand down on the table. He had a knife and he would stab it in between my fingers at a faster and faster rate. I don't think he meant to harm me. It was all about scaring me although he drew blood at least once. I never witnessed him doing this to anyone else because he would always try to make sure you were on your own.
46. When we were watching television he sat up front and he watched what he wanted to watch. He always sat in the comfortable chair but on more than one occasion he threw the chairs across the room regardless of who was there and more than once I was hit by a flying chair. It seemed like there was rage in him. He was just threatening and violent. He instilled a lot of fear in me. I constantly felt afraid of him and that's all I remember feeling.
47. I never reported it because the fear of doing that was even worse. My perception was that you didn't ever speak. At the time that wasn't even an option. You lied about how you were doing constantly to your parents and whoever. It was the unspoken rule.
48. I don't know how much of this was my own fault because I was so shy or maybe I just felt it more strongly because of who I was. Maybe it was so normal that most

people let it slide and thought it was just what happened at a school like that. I could imagine some people today dismissing it as just part of the system.

49. There was a culture of bullying at Gordonstoun. My view was that this was the least safe environment I could ever be in at every level. Teachers could sexually abuse you, your peers could beat you up and there was no consequence ever.

Leaving Gordonstoun School

50. I found out in October of my second year at Gordonstoun that my parents were moving to the States. They asked what I wanted to do and I told them I would rather be with the family than stay at Gordonstoun. Once I knew I was leaving I felt so much lighter because it was just the end of the tunnel and I had the knowledge that everything that was going on was going to be finite. The relief that came over was immense. I told people I was leaving and at that point some people just left me alone more so I don't remember the second year being as bad. I left Gordonstoun in December when the term ended. My brother and sister also left their schools so we moved as a family.

Life after being at Gordonstoun School

51. There was a honeymoon phase after leaving Gordonstoun and the school we went to in Colorado was small. There were twenty six or twenty seven students in the graduating class. All three of us were in the same school for the first time in years and we all liked that. There was no school uniform and you could drive when you were sixteen. There was the romance of being in a new place and it was a great school.
52. I got the highest grades in my entire college and graduated Summa Cum Laude but I didn't have much of a social experience at college because I focused on the academics.

53. My whole life I have been a total workaholic. I own a handyman business and I do consulting work which allows me to be flexible with my hours. I'm now a dad and my son is nine months old and the most adorable human being I have ever met.
54. My grandfather died when he was the same age as I am now and I have feared this year for my entire life. In November I learned that I had a very rare, untreatable blood disorder. There are three or four years before treatment will be available so I have absolutely no idea how long I am going to be alive. I made the very conscious decision then to pull back on work so my wife works during the day and I look after our son.
55. I am trying to figure out what to do medically but I wanted to have my meeting with the Inquiry behind me because it was quietly causing me an enormous amount of anxiety. This increases your chances of having a stroke and, based on my medical condition, I want to put this to rest. The abuse has been in the back of my mind since I was thirteen.
56. My parents live in the Highlands of Scotland and years ago now I drove to Gordonstoun with my sister in some attempt to find peace but I just walked around and then drove home. I had emailed Mr Goss and he wasn't going to be there that day because I think it was during the summer.

Impact

57. There were two incidents which triggered what happened at Gordonstoun and I didn't know how to deal with them because I had never been able to process what I have been through in Gordonstoun or heal from it. They were rough years and it took a long time to fully emerge from that. In my first year in college I walked in on my roommate having sex with my girlfriend and I remember feeling betrayed. Also I had a friend in high school who tried to pressure me to be in a relationship with him even

though I am a straight man. What was horrifying was that I found myself in those situations of being naïve.

58. That's when I found something in exercise and the more I exercised the better I felt. I was seventeen when my eating disorder started. I had mainly exercise bulimia with a bit of anorexia. The exercise was the one thing which allowed me to escape. I spent over three years struggling with this and I came very close to dying because I lost so much weight. I was hospitalised for two days when I was seventeen or eighteen because I weighed 106 pounds and my kidneys started to fail. This destroyed the relationship with my mum because she took it personally.
59. I worked with a nutritionalist to try to understand how to put the weight back on and eventually I emerged from it. At the height of my eating disorder when I was eighteen my parents took me to an in-treatment centre because I think they felt helpless. I remember speaking to the intake woman and she asked me if I wanted to be there because I had to consent. I told her I did not but she told my parents that I had agreed to stay. I got very angry then. I never found someone I trusted to have these conversations with. I decided not to do any formal therapy and tried to figure it out by myself. My dad was in the middle of starting a company so I took a year and a half off and I travelled around the world trying to find beauty and thankfully there is a lot of it.
60. I wrote a manuscript when I went back to college after taking the time off and I have provided a copy of this to the inquiry. This was when I was twenty and I still had a lot stronger memories of my experiences at Gordonstoun. Writing down my experiences helped to an extent. I have provided a copy of this manuscript to the Inquiry.
61. What I remember more than the things that happened is how I felt which is very different. This is tied to what happened but my reaction to it is on me. That is how I internalised what was going on more than what actually happened. I struggled with insomnia and anxiety my entire life and at various points I have contemplated suicide.

62. My personal relationships were most impacted by my experiences at Gordonstoun. I didn't know how to date properly or how to be intimate. There is a reason I didn't get married until I was forty. Before I met my wife I spent a lot of time and a lot of money on therapy although the things that happened to me weren't horrendous and I have heard of much worse happening to children.
63. You have no idea how experiences early on in your life affect things but until I got married two and a half years ago I struggled with intimacy and relationships even to the point where I couldn't sleep in the same bedroom as someone else. This was because of that first year at Gordonstoun, going to bed every night and not knowing what was going to happen. It was just never peaceful.
64. My inability to talk about things is still unfortunately part of who I am. So much of it goes back to the year and a half when I was at Gordonstoun and I chose not to say anything. I have lived with a lot of unhappiness for a long time and I don't blame it on Gordonstoun but I don't think I have lived a full life because of it all. In some way I wish Gordonstoun would fully own what happened and I wish there was a way to be compensated financially for the thousands of dollars I have spent on therapy. I also wish there was a way to turn the clock back.
65. I have lived with a lot of anger, a tendency to avoid all closeness and an inability to deal with difficult situations. I feel horribly distant from my parents. I have never forgiven them for something they didn't even know they did.
66. My single greatest joy has been having a child because I realise the joy you get from that. I want to be a very different father than what my dad was. It's an important part of my life. I don't want to say anything negative about my dad but I don't want to be that man. For my dad's generation this unwillingness to talk about things, to recognise them and to bury whatever what does happen to you. My dad is your quintessential Scottish man and I've seen him cry twice in my entire life. I have had four hugs from him in 43 years and they were forced. This is not a man who speaks in emotion.

67. I wouldn't have spoke to the Inquiry if I took his advice because he told me just to move on from it all. I have never spoken to him about what happened in Gordonstoun. My parents have no interest in knowing what happened. I don't think they had any interest in what was actually going on at the school and if they did they certainly never told me.
68. The hard part is that my parents are turning seventy and the only people who know I am talking with the Inquiry are my wife and my brother. He is a recovering alcoholic and has just celebrated a year of being sober. He has had to go through an enormous healing so he and I talk very freely about all of life's stuff and that has been very helpful.
69. I am very close to my sister although she lives in the South of France and I don't see her very often. We talk every couple of weeks and she is one of the few people I let read the manuscript I wrote but we don't really talk about anything like that.

Reporting of Abuse


70. Years later I emailed Gordonstoun to inform them about the abuse and I got a very quick response but I did nothing with it for a long time. I didn't know what to do and I kept on putting it to the side. The headmaster mentioned he had to notify the police. I made it clear in my email that I wasn't planning to do anything and it was just to tell him but he said he was required to report it. The police then contacted me and for reasons I don't understand I did nothing with it. I just didn't feel comfortable.
71. I am planning to speak to the police now. Something about getting married and having a child made me change my mind. I just don't want to spend my life carrying it all.

Lessons to be Learned

72. In hindsight I think there was a massive failing on the part of the school, particularly because of the sexual abuse. I got the sense that all of this was ongoing and if the school really cared about not having that reputation a person like Mr Goss would have spoken in front of the entire House and said that he would not tolerate it but there was never ever anything like that from his mouth. As far as he was concerned nothing was happening or he was just part of the system where it was quietly understood that this was part of being a student at Gordonstoun. I don't want to make that assumption but you can't help but wonder. It would have been quite naïve as an adult to not see any of it and that to me is strange.
73. At 43 years old with a child of my own, I know that the only thing I would try to figure out is the culture of a school but when you are that age all you do is see the campus. In the late eighties or early nineties no one was asking about the culture of a school. There should be public awareness about abuse and parents should be aware of the history. They should accept that there is a risk in sending your child to some of these schools.
74. There should be some anonymous way for children to report that something is happening so that they don't fear any consequences although I can't imagine any of this is ongoing today. My hope is that schools are paying attention to this and doing everything they humanly can not to let it happen to anyone else. Maybe this has all been addressed and this is very much a thing of the past.

Other information

75. I googled Andy Keir after I had initial contact from the Inquiry and discovered that he had been convicted of sexual abuse.
76. 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..........
DocuSigned by:
BQA
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Dated..... 19 July 2021