

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

RFJ

Support person present: Yes.

1. My name is RFJ. My date of birth is 1947. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. My mother's name was [REDACTED] and my father was called [REDACTED]. My sister [REDACTED] was four years older than me and my sister [REDACTED] was three years younger than me. [REDACTED] always had to look after me. I was a difficult child. We lived in Govan. My father was a seaman. He was in the merchant navy and he was away a lot. We stayed mostly in single ends which were one bedroomed houses where we slept and lived in the one room. Some of them had outside toilets. Sometimes we were fortunate and had an inside toilet.
3. We were quite poor. I think my mother found it difficult to manage us as most people did in those times. My mother's health wasn't great and she was in and out of hospital quite a lot. She had been ill as a child and she was left with a lot of weaknesses. I believe she suffered from heart disease. She coped quite well for somebody with her condition. She was a very loving woman and quite gentle. She struggled with my dad being at sea all the time and having us as young children.
4. Other family members lived nearby. I remember family gatherings at my gran's and the children would be sent to a different room to play. We also played in old buildings which used to be wash houses. We cleaned them out and made wee houses. I fell

down the chimney in one of them and I was scratched and cut. We went on holiday to Rossie and I was all bandaged up. I think my mother was sent there for a break and we went with her. I think my father turned up there at one point. He was as drunk as a lord as seamen were in those days.

5. I went into care when I was about three and a half because my mother went into hospital and my father was away at sea. I know this from what I have been told. I think I was in three homes before I went to school. One was in Largs and one was Rhu home. I can't remember where I went first. I was terrified in the homes. I always felt something was going to happen to me. I didn't like them and I followed [REDACTED] around all the time.
6. I remember country walks in Largs. I don't know how long I stayed in the home there. One of the homes was quite near the sea and I remember being at the beach a few times. My sister, [REDACTED], was in the homes with me. We were in the same dorm in one of the homes at Christmas because I remember we thought we heard Santa's sleigh bells. We weren't in the same dorm in Rhu home.

Rhu Home

7. Rhu was a big, old fashioned building. It was grey stone. It looked foreboding. It was in its own grounds.
8. The staff were strict but not in a cruel manner. They weren't allowed to talk. They just had to get on and do their jobs. They would look at you quickly and then go on to do their jobs. They didn't have time to spend with you or to talk to you. They would give us dinner, get us up in the morning and put us to bed at night. There were other staff members there, day and night, but I don't know if they lived in the home. I don't remember male members of staff. I think the staff wore grey uniforms.
9. The matron was in charge of them. She was in control. She was a big woman to me. She was quite stocky and she was very stern. I was terrified of her. She never spoke

to you. She just shouted. I tried to stay out of her way. She shouted for everything and she shouted at everybody. If you moved she would shout at you. If you looked the wrong way she would shout at you. She just came in shouting and everybody, including the staff, froze. She also screamed at the staff. The matron wore some kind of hat on her head and I seem to remember a belt with a buckle. I think she had a cloak. She looked a bit like a nurse.

10. None of the children ever spoke. They never said a word. They were terrified. The matron was like a witch. She lived in the home so she was always there. You knew if she was nearby because the staff would freeze. The staff never spoke. It was as if when she was there nobody had control but her. When anybody spoke it was her that spoke. She laid down the rules.
11. Mostly what I remember about the home was the fear. I was absolutely terrified in that place. I just cried all the time. At night I used to put my head under the blankets and cry and cry. I kept peeking out to see if the matron was coming. I kept thinking a nightmare was coming to visit. Rhu was a place of fear and terror. There was no show of emotions or human contact.
12. There were older children than me in Rhu because they used to go to school and I stayed in a room with some of the younger children. The room had toys in it. I don't remember playing at all when I was in the home. I just sat at the window and waited for my sister to come back from school. I had contact with my sister while I was in the home. I was in Rhu for a few weeks or a couple of months. I don't remember the time of year but the home was always cold. I recall swings in the grounds so I probably played on them.

Routine at Rhu Home

First day

13. I don't remember going to Rhu. I just remember being there.

Mornings and bedtimes

14. We all had single beds. There were two rows of children in the dorm and about eight or ten beds. I think it was girls in my dorm and I don't remember any boys in the home. There must have been more than one dormitory because my sister was in the other one. At night I used to look out and watch for the matron coming. The staff came around at night with a torch and everybody was checked. Sometimes staff came round and sometimes it was the matron. We didn't make a sound because we didn't want to be spotted. The children didn't even talk to each other. We just lay there in silence. If the matron came into the dorm at night and anybody was awake she would shout and bawl at us. She woke the whole place up.
15. I think a staff member came into the dorm in the morning and told us to get up and get dressed. I had to dress myself. Then we would all line up and go along to the dining room when we were told to do so.

Mealtimes / Food

16. Breakfast was toast and cocoa. We may have got cereal too. I loved the nice hot cocoa. Meal times were a serious time. You just went in, ate your meal and got out. I can only remember getting two meals a day. The next meal was dinner. I don't know if that was at lunchtime or later on. You ate what was put in front of you. You weren't allowed to leave anything or the matron would come in and shout at you. We knew where we had to sit. I don't think a staff member sat with us.

Washing / bathing

17. We washed and cleaned our teeth before breakfast. The staff stood over you at bedtime to make sure you washed and cleaned your teeth.

Clothing / uniform

18. They had a routine with your clothes. They always had to be fixed on a chair next to your bed. They had to be in the right place and in the right order. I think this was clothes that we had been given by the home because I think the clothes I wore weren't mine. We all wore a cotton thing and a pinafore. I think this was changed because I remember it being crisp as if it was laundered.

Visits

19. My granny and my dad visited once and my gran picked up that there was something wrong. They took us out and we had a good day out with them. I enjoyed being away from the home. We had to get a bus back to the home and staff from the home came on to the bus and my sister and I froze. My granny saw that we looked terrified. She was talking to us at the time and she noticed this and asked us what the matter was. ██████ told my granny to be quiet because the staff from the home were on the bus and we were frightened to talk. Apparently my granny went home and told my mum about what had happened. I heard this in later life.
20. We were frightened because the staff were part of that place. They were under the control of the matron so they couldn't do anything for us. We couldn't go to them for help. I believe they felt useless because some of them looked quite kindly. You could see a kindness in their eyes but they couldn't do anything.

Healthcare

21. I seem to recall our hair being checked for lice when we arrived but I don't recall any other medical treatment.

Bed Wetting

22. I wet the bed sometimes. One night I had done it and the staff got me up during the night to change me. I was standing with no clothes on for a while and I was frozen.

The next thing my sister appeared beside me and the matron was shouting at the two of us that I had wet the bed. The other staff were there but they didn't say anything. The sheets were lying on the floor and the matron told my sister to take the sheets into the toilet and wash them. [REDACTED] had to wash them and I felt terrible about that. She told me the water was cold and she was trying to wash the sheets. Then they put a night gown on me and put me back into bed. I would rather have gone into the wash room with [REDACTED] because at least I would have felt I was getting punished as well. I felt that she was getting punished because I had wet the bed.

Abuse at Rhu Home

23. I have always been a slow eater and one day I was taking too long at finishing my meal. I think this was dinner or supper. The staff were trying to clear up. They always looked frightened. The matron came in and she started shouting at the staff because I was still eating and holding everybody up. The matron told me to hurry up. She stuck the food in my mouth and I was choking. I remember choking and it was awful. I just couldn't eat the food. I vaguely remember [REDACTED] saying that I couldn't eat quickly but the matron kept stuffing the food into my mouth.

24. I could feel something sticking in the back of my throat. I don't know if this was the cutlery or if it was food but something was sticking in the back of my throat and it was really sore. Then the matron started shaking me really viciously all over the place. The shaking went on for ages. She hurt my left arm and it was really sore. My sister remembers that the matron either told me to go into the kitchen or one of the staff was told to take me into the kitchen and that I was to finish my food. My sister remembers a member of staff taking the food off me and putting it into the bin. The matron came in asking whether I was finished and the member of staff nodded and I got away.

25. That night in bed I couldn't lie on my arm because it was so sore and I had to lie on my other side. I couldn't lift my arm up and I couldn't use it to get dressed the following morning. It was just hanging. We went home not long after that incident.
26. One night I was being punished for something and I was sent to my dorm. I missed a meal because of this. During the night I was crying and one of the staff members who had come around to check on us asked me what was wrong. I told her that I was hungry and she brought me a half slice of bread folded into a quarter. Matron came in and caught me eating it. She stuffed it down my throat. I remember her nails scratching the back of my throat. It was horrible. I just kept crying. All I did in that place was cry.
27. One day we were out walking in the country and the children were picking brambles. This was within walking distance of the home. We used to get a freshly laundered hankie every day and I put all my brambles in my hankie. One of the other children told me that I was going to get into trouble because the juice from the brambles had stained the hankie. I remember being terrified and thinking that the matron was going to get me again.

Leaving Rhu Home

28. I don't remember leaving Rhu, I just remember being at home again. My granny noticed there was something wrong with my arm and I have been told that my mum took me to the doctor about it and that it had been pulled out of the socket. My mum asked me what had happened to my arm and I told her but I think [REDACTED] gave her more details. My shoulder was dislocated and somebody pushed it back in but I don't remember who.
29. I went to a home in Largs after I left Rhu and I shared a dorm with my sister [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later [REDACTED] I think I was there for three or four weeks because my mum wasn't well again.

Life after being in care

30. We moved house quite a lot when I was a child for various reasons such as to be close to my granny and to have a house with an inside toilet. I think my younger sister went into care when I was at school but I don't know the reason why. My education was poor because it was disrupted by being in care and moving house regularly. My parents split up for a period of time due to my father's heavy drinking but they got back together again.
31. We were a typical family who had regular contact with our aunts and uncles. All the family stayed in Govan so we met there regularly. When I was eight the housing scheme at Drumchapel was built and my father persuaded my mother to move there into a new house with a bedroom for us girls, hot and cold water and a bath. We had never had these things before. Moving there was the downfall of my mother. She went downhill fast after that because she was away from her family. It wasn't easy in those days for people to travel and my parents didn't have any money. My mum was really cut off from her family and she went into severe depressions.
32. The three of us mucked along. My father was still at sea but at least we three girls had each other. We were very close as sisters although we fought and argued like most families. We are still very close. We have always been a rock for each other. Life wasn't bad but it was a struggle to get through and keep going but it prepared us for life. My mother was overdosing on her medication so she was like a zombie at times. She also suffered from rheumatoid arthritis so she was in a lot of pain as a result of that. We girls did most of the housework and in later days we did all the cooking.
33. When I left school at fifteen my parents had already got me a job in Littlewoods. I worked in the catering department but I hated it. I worked in several other shops and then I went to work in a box making factory because some of my friends worked there and they said it was good money and good bonuses. [REDACTED] was working

there too. It was a hard job. Our hands would be covered in blood. I worked there for a number of years.

34. I got married at eighteen. I had my daughter shortly afterwards because I was pregnant when I got married. My husband was a heavy drinker and so the marriage started to fall apart. We separated and reconciled a few times. My sisters got married too and then we all divorced because our husbands were heavy drinkers like our father.
35. My mum died when I was twenty. She was forty nine years old. My dad stayed at sea for another few years and then he lived with [REDACTED] and then with me for a period of time before he moved to his own house and subsequently died. After my daughter was born I worked nightshifts. I worked up until I retired.

Impact

36. I don't think I functioned properly when I was in Rhu. I don't know how I got through it and it damaged me. I find it very difficult to trust people. I'm not a very confident person and I think this is a result of my time in care. I have anxieties about things. I always think something terrible is going to happen. I have had counselling but I didn't talk about my time in care. I haven't talked to anybody about it except my sister. My family doesn't even know about it. I don't want to put those horrors on them.
37. As an adult I can see that the matron loved her control. She relished it. She loved to see people shaking. I hope she never had children of her own or God help them.

Records

38. I have never tried to recover my records. I don't know if I want to see them.

Lessons to be Learned

- 39. I am just hoping that by speaking about my experience that lessons will be learned and people won't suffer like we did. It is hard, though, to make individuals act like humans. People in authority should be taught how to look after children in care and treat children like they would like their own children to be treated. Just because you are a child doesn't mean you don't have feelings and you don't suffer pain and hurt which you carry through the rest of your life. This affects the kind of parent you are.

- 40. I hope the inquiry can achieve an awareness of the damage. I don't think staff like the matron should be left in control for the period of time that she was. She knew she had total control of the home for as long as she wanted. She was in control of everything. People should be checked and monitored and moved about. People should have to write reports and other people should check on them. Questions should be asked. Children should be spoken to as they grow up and are able to answer.

- 41. 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.. RFJ

Dated... 23/1/2020