

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PGO [REDACTED]

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is PGO [REDACTED]. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1960 and I am presently fifty-nine years of age. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. My parents were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I have a sister called [REDACTED], who is two years older than me, another sister called [REDACTED] and a brother called [REDACTED], who are both about two or three years younger. I'm not sure which of them is older. I've also got another sister called [REDACTED] who is about eight years younger. Both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have my step-father's surname, he was [REDACTED].
3. We lived at [REDACTED] in Aberdeen where my dad was a coalman at first before he ended up going to sea before I was three years old. I remember running away one time and going to the Salvation Army church where the choir were singing. Mum and dad were apparently looking for me for hours and when they did eventually find me I got taken home and dad gave me a belting for running away. It was sore, but I deserved it because they were obviously worried about me.
4. Dad and mum were falling out all the time. When dad was at home he was a heavy drinker and when he was away at sea I think my mum ended up working as a prostitute. She was going on and off the boats all the time he was away.

11. I'm not sure how many children there were, possibly around forty and there were both boys and girls. I think the youngest would have been about three and the oldest about eleven. I don't remember seeing any older children and I don't remember any names of the other children.

Routine at Lagarie House

First day

12. It looked good when we arrived at Lagarie because I saw children playing on the swings and on the roundabout in the grounds. As soon as the social work department left, I went over and started to play with the other children. Our own clothes were then taken from us and we had to put on what the matron gave us.
13. I thought I was going to have a nice time at Lagarie, but from the next day on until I left, it was as if I was in hell. All you could hear for the whole time I was there was children crying and screaming.

Mornings and bedtime

14. I slept in a dormitory near to the fire escape on the first floor with three other boys for the whole time I was at Lagarie, although different boys came and went while I stayed there. I think the girls slept in bigger dormitories with six or seven beds in them.
15. We were woken about 7:30 am by one of the staff and we all had to go and get washed, clean our teeth and then go back into the dormitory and get dressed.
16. We always had to fold our clothes in a certain way with our socks on top. When we got dressed, we had to put our socks on first, then our underpants, then a tee shirt and then our trousers. All the time we were supervised by either the matron or KER

17. Once we were dressed, we had to make our beds and then stand beside them and wait until we were told to go down for our breakfast.
18. At night we were all put to our beds about 7:30 pm or 8:00 pm. We had to brush our teeth and then get ourselves undressed, take our shoes off and put them at the bottom of our beds and fold our clothes neatly on a chair at the side of our beds. This was supervised as well. You couldn't do anything without the matron watching.

Washing/bathing

19. We all washed in one big bathroom, which had several sinks in it. We never all got in at once, but we would all be supervised by either the matron or KER. If the matron was supervising, she was always very authoritative and I just tried to stay out of the way, not catch her attention and wash myself in the corner.
20. I didn't like baths and I always got a shower. There were two or three small cubicles that were open at the front so that we could be supervised. The matron was always standing there watching, making sure we were cleaning ourselves properly and telling us to make sure we were spotless.

Mealtimes/Food

21. We all ate at one long table in the dining room. At every meal we had to form a queue and help ourselves to whatever there was. Once we'd got our meal, we had to go back to the table and stand beside it until we were told to sit down and eat.
22. For breakfast we had a small bowl of either cornflakes or 'Weetabix', we were never allowed a big bowl of either. I don't remember getting anything other than cereal for breakfast, but it was okay. The rest of the meals were just bland and tasteless. I don't know who prepared them, I certainly don't remember seeing a cook coming in. There might have been chicken and potatoes or something like that and I don't remember what happened if somebody didn't eat their food.

Clothing/uniform

23. Lagarie House supplied our clothes and we always wore the same. It wasn't a uniform, just ordinary clothes, but we all wore a grey jumper and a grey tee shirt, black shoes, grey shorts and grey or black socks. It was all second hand stuff and I don't know how often we had to change them.

Leisure time

24. There was a roundabout in the dormitory that I slept in that had horses on it and we were allowed to play on it for a while after breakfast, but that was about it. There were no toys and we never got to play football or anything like that.
25. I don't remember any trips or holidays and the only time we got to play was when our mum or dad were coming. It was just for show and as soon as they went away we were all told to get inside again. Even when the sun was shining we would rarely get outside.
26. I do remember one time seeing some of the other kids playing outside while I stood inside watching them. I think I must have done something wrong, but I don't recall what it might have been. I was crying my eyes out because the matron, Mrs Millar, wouldn't let me go out.

School

27. I don't remember anything about school at Lagarie. I don't even remember going to school while I was there, although I must have. I don't know whether there was a school in the place or if we went out to a local school.

Healthcare

28. Nobody came to see us and check on our health. I don't remember seeing a doctor or a nurse or a dentist, even for any injections we should have been getting.

Religious instruction

29. We never went to church or had any religious instruction. I used to pray at the side of my bed at night, but that was just for me, we weren't made to do so. I don't remember seeing anyone else praying.

Work

30. We all had to do the dishes. Everybody took turns to wash or dry all the dishes for the whole place and set the table. If somebody broke a dish they would get a terrible hiding from the matron. I never saw anyone getting a hiding, but they would be taken into the matron's office and I heard the screaming and, although nobody ever said, I knew what was happening.

Birthdays and Christmas

31. We would get a present from our mum and dad for our birthdays, but there was nothing from the home. At Christmas there was a tree and there would be presents under it, but again only if our mum or dad had sent something. Even then, once Christmas was over our toys were taken away and I never saw them again.
32. I remember one Christmas my dad gave me a little red three-wheeler bike. I remember having a go on it on the path outside, but once Christmas was over I never saw it again. I don't know what happened to it.

Visits/Inspections

33. There were no inspections that I was aware of. I can't even remember the social worker that dropped us off, Mrs Bruce, coming to see us.
34. My parents would come and visit us when they had money to do so. They wouldn't come together, it would either be my mum or dad separately. The matron would tell

us that they might be coming and I would cheer right up, but sometimes my dad wouldn't appear because he'd been drinking.

35. They could come and visit anytime they wanted, but if they did, the matron would always be there in case you said anything to them. We would see them in a room that was like a library, full of children's books and toys. We never got a chance to read those books or play with the toys though, they were just for show.
36. If anyone did come to see us the matron would give us sweets not to say anything and she would threaten us as well. She would tell me that if I said anything I would be punished. I would promise her I wouldn't say a word and she would give me a sweet.
37. Whenever my parents did come, I'd run after them crying my eyes out when they went away.

Sibling contact

38. Even though my brother and sisters were in Lagarie with me, we were never allowed to play together. I think I only saw my little sister [REDACTED] once in all the time I was there.

Running away

39. I felt like I was a dog in a cage at Lagarie and I couldn't get out, but I did manage to run away once, bare naked, when I was eight years old.
40. I had been put in a cold bath by the matron sometime during the day and I'd had enough. I got out the fire escape and ran right down the lane, trying to get cars to stop and help me, but none would. Even though I was naked and crying my eyes out, nobody stopped.
41. Eventually somebody from the home came with a blanket and took me back. I can't remember who it was. When I got back I was thrown in a bath of cold water by the

matron again and she put soap on her fingers and shoved them down the back of my throat.

42. After I ran away that one time the fire escape door was always locked. I tried to run away a few more times, but the door was never open again.

Discipline

43. The matron, Mrs Millar, was a strict disciplinarian. We all had to polish our shoes, even at eight years old, and stand in a line while she inspected us. She would have a cane in her hand and if a kid's shoes weren't clean enough she would hit them over their knuckles.
44. That never happened to me although I saw it happening to other boys. I always made sure my shoes were spotless and I kept my head down. I never got hit, but I heard her telling other boys to hold their hands out and I saw her rap their knuckles with the cane.

Bed Wetting

45. I didn't suffer from bed wetting much of the time, but it did happen occasionally. I was afraid to get out of my bed during the night in case the matron heard me. Even if someone needed the toilet during the night, they weren't allowed.
46. A lot of children did wet the bed and if they did the matron would take them for a cold bath when she found out in the morning. I remember one little boy wet the bed a lot and I'm sure he got the cane over his backside from the matron for doing so. I don't remember the little boy's name, but I do remember seeing he had red marks on his backside afterwards, although he never spoke about it.
47. I'm not sure what happened with the wet sheets. One of the staff must have taken them away and washed them.

Abuse at Lagarie House

48. The physical, emotional and sexual abuse I suffered at Lagarie was constant. It was every day and it continued for the whole two-and-a-half years I was there. There were times while I was there that I just wanted to kill myself. I felt as if I wasn't worth anything.
49. The matron, Mrs Millar, seemed to constantly want to hurt children for no reason that I was aware of. She was a very nasty woman.
50. I don't know why she used to punish me, I didn't think I ever did anything wrong, but Mrs Millar would regularly pick me up by my ears and throw me in a bath of cold water. She was so forceful that the skin behind my ears was always cut and scabbed.
51. She would do this at any time of the day or night. I might be in my bed at night and I would hear the bath running and I would know someone was going to get it. She would come into our room and pick anybody and drag them away. I could never really sleep in case she came in and got me. I might have been lying in my bed for two hours or so and she would come in. I was always cowering, hoping it wasn't going to be me.
52. I saw other kids getting dragged away, but a lot of the time it was me because I spent all my time crying. She would never say anything, just pull me out of bed and drag me away by the ears. There was never anyone else about in the bathroom when she did this, no other staff or children.
53. Once I was in the bath, she would force my head back, put carbolic soap on her fingers and shove them down my throat. Then she would take me out of the bath and make me stand naked in the corner, freezing cold. If I wet myself while I was standing there she would put me back in the cold bath again.

54. Another thing Mrs Millar did was she would sit me on the floor with my head between her thighs as she sat in a chair. I can still smell her. She would hold me with her thighs, tip my head back and put her fingers down my throat. Again, I don't know what I might have done wrong. I was only a little boy.
55. I never saw her doing the same thing to any other children, but I would hear children screaming all the time. None of the other kids mentioned getting the same treatment from her, but I did see that my sister [REDACTED] was covered in bruises one time. I didn't ask her about them so I don't know how she got them, but I saw them when she was playing outside one time.
56. On one occasion there was a fire and I got the blame for it. I think someone had set a mattress alight, but I don't know if the fire service were there. I never did it, but I got the blame and I got a hell of a battering from Mrs Millar for that. She dragged me into her office and hit me across the backside with her cane a lot of times. I don't remember how many times.
57. Every time the matron put me in the cold bath, she took me down to the potting shed afterwards and left me with Mr Skelton, the gardener. Mr Skelton abused me sexually almost every day for the entire two-and-a-half years I was at Lagarie.
58. I'll never forget that potting shed. It was low down and you had to go down steps to get into it.
59. After the matron left Mr Skelton would come in. He would tell me to hold his penis, but I refused. I didn't want to and I would keep on shouting "No, no", but he wouldn't stop. He would put me over the table that was in there and he penetrated my backside. He ejaculated and I would scream, but nobody came to help me.
60. When he finished, he would throw me on the floor and I would curl up and cry. Every time was much the same thing and it was so painful. I was often bleeding, but I never told anyone about it and I never had any medical attention.

61. I never saw any other boys being sexually abused by Mr Skelton, but it wasn't just me. I learned later that he abused other boys as well.

Reporting of abuse at Lagarie House

62. I know that other boys were put in cold baths, because the lads that were in my dormitory would tell me it had happened to them. We never spoke about what happened any more than that though.
63. I tried to tell my mum and dad when they came to visit what was going on, but I don't think they believed me. Even if they had, they couldn't have done anything anyway.

Leaving Lagarie House

64. I thought that my brother and sisters and I all left Lagarie at the same time in 1971, when I was about eleven years old. I've since learned from my records that they were actually in for about a year-and-a-half longer though. The matron came and told me that we were all moving back up to Aberdeen and I was so pleased. It felt like a release and I was so happy.
65. Our mother came down to Lagarie and she wanted to confront the Matron and ask her why she was abusing us children, but she never did. Apparently she had heard about the matron abusing children because seemingly KER had told her what had been going on. I overheard my mum talking later on and she said KER KER had said something. I don't know what was said, but I know that my mum knew something.
66. Someone who I think was from the social work came down to get us and we all got put in the car and taken away. It may have been Mrs Bruce again.

67. When we got back to Aberdeen we were put into another children's home at Rubislaw Den North in Aberdeen, which I now know was called Aberlour Family Home. I believed that we had to stay there because mum and dad were separating and going through a divorce. Mum had taken up with [REDACTED] by that time and she eventually married him.

Rubislaw Den North, Aberdeen

68. [REDACTED]

69. [REDACTED]

70. [REDACTED]

71. [REDACTED]

Secondary [REDACTED] After we had been there for a few months we were all taken to Craigielea Children's Centre in Aberdeen by the social worker Mrs Bruce.

Craigielea Children's Centre, Aberdeen

72. [REDACTED]

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

73.

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80. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

81. I remember having my sixteenth birthday in Craigielea and not long after it my brother and sisters and I all left. My mum and step dad had moved to Montrose by that time and there was more room so we moved out of Craigielea altogether and went to live with them.

Life after being in care

82. When we got to Montrose, I got a job in [REDACTED] Bonding Company and worked there for a couple of years. After that I worked in a biscuit factory that was also in Montrose and while I was there I studied courses for offshore safety ships.

83. I got a job on an offshore safety ship and spent thirty-seven years, the rest of my working life, on the boats doing rescues for the oil rigs. I worked my way up to daughter-craft coxswain, although in all my time there was never a real emergency, we spent all our time training and practising. I loved it.

84. I don't have any children, but I've been married twice. My first wife was a prostitute and I married her because I wanted to take her off the street. That marriage ended after she took all my money off me and didn't pay the bills. My second marriage was to a lovely woman. I met her online and we've been together five years now. She's made me very strong.

Impact

85. I don't have many friends, I find it difficult to trust anyone. I don't like crowds and I like to have my own space. I'm a very quiet person and I find it difficult to speak to anyone about anything other than simple things like football.

86. Although I have been married twice, I feel that I can't have children because I was abused. I feel that mentally I'm not capable.
87. I don't think I ever went to hospital while I was at Lagarie, but I've still got scars from the stitches behind my ears that I got from Mrs Millar constantly lifting me up by them. I don't remember when or where I got the stitches, or who gave me them, but my ears still get sore and I have to go to my doctor to get an injection behind them for the pain. I've also still got marks on my gums from her fingernails as she forced her hands in my mouth.
88. To this day I don't like anything down my throat. I've had to say that to the hospital a few times when they wanted to put a camera down my throat.
89. Lagarie House is constantly in my head. I can see the matron and Mr Skelton the gardener clearly in my head. I wish I could get rid of the thoughts but I can't.
90. While I was at sea, I felt like I could have jumped over the side of the boat into the water. I thought about killing myself many times, but I don't have the nerve. I have stood at the edge of the boat in the dark, looked in the water and thought about jumping in, but I thought of my family and I couldn't.
91. Even though I enjoyed my life at sea, I think my life could have been a lot better if it hadn't been for what I suffered at Lagarie. I lost my childhood.

Reporting of Abuse

92. In 1986 my brother [REDACTED] got the ball rolling and contacted [REDACTED] newspaper about what had happened to us all at Lagarie. I spoke to a reporter after [REDACTED] had and they printed a story, but it wasn't the whole thing. They just took part of what we'd told them.

93. After I spoke to [REDACTED], a police officer from Aberdeen came and spoke to me. I think I gave the police a statement, but I can't really remember. I don't think anything came of it.
94. I have never spoken to anybody else about what happened until I was contacted by [REDACTED] for an investigation they were doing in 2018. I'm not sure how they got my name.

- [REDACTED]
95. I was contacted by a [REDACTED] about Lagarie called [REDACTED]. The journalist was called [REDACTED] and I gave a statement [REDACTED] to him about what happened to me. As soon as I sat down and started telling what had happened I burst out crying.
96. [REDACTED] later put me in touch with other people that had been at Lagarie and it was then that I found out other boys had also been sexually abused by Mr Skelton the gardener. One of them was called [REDACTED], or something like that, and he told me other boys were abused by Mr Skelton as well.
97. I was told by [REDACTED] that there had been a police investigation while Mr Skelton was still alive, but for some reason nothing came of it. They could have had Mr Skelton in jail. It should have been followed through.

Records

98. I got my records when I was about eighteen from Aberdeen council. I wanted to have them, but I never looked at them, they just sat in a box.

Redress

99. I have instructed Thompsons Solicitors in Aberdeen to try and get compensation for me from the British Sailors' Society. My solicitor now has all my records and she has told me that my running away from Lagarie naked is recorded in the records, but there is nothing mentioned about trying to find out why I had run away. A lot of what is written has been blacked out.
100. I've been assessed by a psychologist who was sent by my solicitor. She came to my house and examined me and she has given her report to my solicitors. I have a copy of her report and can provide a copy to the Inquiry if required.

Lessons to be Learned/Hopes for the Inquiry

101. Staff who have children in their care should be trained to listen to the children and not abuse them. They should know not to discipline children for doing little things like breaking a plate or whatever. They shouldn't make children feel inadequate or put them down like I was.
102. The British Sailors' Society should have been inspecting Lagarie House properly. I've never even had an apology from them. We've just had to live with it and it's too late now.
103. I would like a face-to-face apology from the British Sailors' Society. I want them to answer my questions, such as why didn't they come and help and why they didn't check up on the matron. I want to know why I had to go through all the abuse.
104. I know that child abuse is happening all over the world, but it needs to stop completely.

Other information

- 105. Dad ended up an alcoholic and died of sclerosis of the liver.
- 106. I keep in contact with my brother [REDACTED] still, but I don't keep in contact with my sisters because we all fell out.
- 107. 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... PGO [REDACTED]

Dated... 30/09/2019