

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

RFK

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is RFK. My date of birth is the 1942. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was brought up in Govan in Glasgow and I was the oldest of three daughters. After me it's and then it's.
3. My father was a merchant seaman and was away a lot on long voyages. My mother was at home looking after us. My father was and my mother was.
4. Life was alright but my mother was quite poor so she found it hard. She got money monthly from my father and we could be alright for the first week or so but then we could get really hungry over the next few weeks.
5. We did grow up happy, but I had a lot of illnesses when I was young, so I spent a lot of time in hospital. I remember when I was older, I once said to my mother that I had no real memory of Christmas when I was young. She told me that was because I was only home for Christmas twice before I was twelve years old, as I was always in hospital.

6. My mum told me that I had pneumonia a number of times, I had scarlet fever and I had diphtheria. I was very ill in the hospital and they thought I was going to die. My mum was pregnant with [REDACTED] at that time.
7. The family actually thought I was going to die when my mum was in hospital having [REDACTED]. The doctors had even said to my gran to get a priest as they didn't think I was going to make it.
8. After that I spent a lot of time in East Park Convalescent Home, which was a convalescent home for children. That's what they did back in those days and I was there for long periods of time from about the age of five.
9. East Park was linked to Yorkhill Hospital and I must have been in there at least twice, for about seven months one time and then for about a year. I was sent to other convalescent homes in and around Glasgow as well. I remember one was Hillfoot Residential School in Milngavie, which was local authority.
10. I remember being in these convalescent homes and then back home. Mum was moving house all the time, but I still had quite a happy childhood. I do remember my father coming home from sea, getting quite drunk and then arguing with my mum but even so, we were still happy enough.
11. My mum had a heart condition and she was in hospital quite a lot when she was pregnant, because of that. Sometimes she would be in hospital and I'd be home and sometimes we would both be in hospital. It was funny the way things happened.
12. I was in a care place in Largs when I was about six. I was in there with my sister [REDACTED] and it was a lovely home, but I forget the name of the place. We were only put in there because my mum was in hospital. It was a convalescent home and it was good but we were only there for about a month or so.

13. I also went to a home somewhere near St. Andrew's as well. I can't remember its name, but I do know I wasn't with [REDACTED] at that place. I remember it was nice, but I can't remember anything else. I think it was a convalescent place as well.
14. When mum was expecting [REDACTED] she had to go into hospital. [REDACTED] and myself then had to go into care. We went to Rhu because my father was in the merchant navy, and the home was run by the Merchant Seaman Organisation. They got us the places in that home, so we went there when my mum was in hospital.
15. I was about seven and [REDACTED] was about three and a half, so it would have been in about 1949. We were both in Rhu together, for about two months. I have since learned, from Future Pathways, that the home at Rhu was called Lagarie House.

Lagarie House, Rhu, Helensburgh

General

16. I remember Rhu was a big stately home and set in grounds. I seem to remember it was fenced off with a wire fence of some kind to the back. There were corridors with dormitories and bathrooms and toilets, all upstairs. I also remember a big open room with windows where we all would sit, a kitchen and a big dining room.
17. [REDACTED] and I were put in separate dorms so I only saw her during the day, but we weren't stopped from seeing one another. I was in one dorm and she was in another one, a way along the corridor. Younger children all seemed to be in one dorm and older children were in another. I was in the older one and [REDACTED] was in the younger one.
18. We were actually separated quite a bit and I don't know why that was. She did go off and play with the younger children at times, but at other times I remember [REDACTED] would come up to me and spend time with me as I was her sister. She did cry a lot

as she was missing her mum. We weren't happy at all in Rhu. [REDACTED] hated it, she would follow me about a lot, but she was only three and a half.

19. There were boys at Rhu, but I don't remember exactly where they were in the building. There was at least two all-girl dormitories and there must have been at least one boys dormitory. I don't remember much about the building, I just remember always going to wherever you were meant to go.
20. In my dormitory I had a single bed with a chair at the bottom. I only remember being in [REDACTED]'s dormitory once, in all the time I was there.
21. I remember the matron, she just shouted all the time. I don't remember her name but she was a big woman and wore a big white hat and a grey dress. She was the boss and everybody knew that. She was maybe in her fifties, or maybe much older, I didn't think about her age at all.
22. All the staff at Rhu were afraid of the matron. The cleaners that came in and the maids that helped out in the kitchen, they were all frightened of her. You could hear it in their voices when she was coming, they would say things like 'here she comes, here she comes'.
23. Even the teaching staff knew the matron was the boss. They would sometimes give her a look, as if they weren't too happy with what was going on, but they still all knew what she said goes.

Routine at Lagarie House, Rhu

First day

24. I don't actually remember how we got to Rhu but I do remember the place. There are certain things I remember so well. I do remember learning quite quickly what a very strict place it was.

Mornings and bedtime

25. In the mornings we all got up early. Someone, I don't know who, would get us up and we would all get washed and ready for breakfast.
26. I don't remember much about bedtime. We had to go and wash our face and neck, do our teeth and fold our clothes the right way before placing them on our chair. I don't remember what we wore, it must have been night dresses. It was no pants or vests in bed, I remember that.

Mealtimes/Food

27. We had all our meals in the dining hall and the food was alright. There were big long tables and the younger kids would sit at one end with the older ones at the other end.
28. All the kids knew that you just ate whatever was put in front of you. It didn't matter whether you liked it or not. You would always clear your plate or the matron would be shouting at you to get it finished. If you didn't eat your food, matron might pull you aside, like she did with [REDACTED] one time.
29. Everyone just knew what to do after breakfast and all the kids that were going to school knew to go and line up. I don't remember what happened at lunch time but I remember we all ate together at tea time, in the dining room.
30. Matron would shout at the kids when she was walking up and down the aisle. She would tell you to hurry up and get it down you if you were eating too slowly. It was only ever matron that did all the shouting.
31. There were other staff there and they were strict, I remember that, but they didn't shout and bawl at the kids, like the matron did.

Washing / bathing

32. I remember having baths and quite a few of us would be put in the bath at the same time. It was all girls. I think we just washed ourselves and I remember the water was cold most of the time. It was cold in the bathroom as well because the windows were always open for fresh air.
33. I remember one time I was in a bath with another girl when a member of staff came in and popped a wee girl into the bath with us. She was only about two or three and all of a sudden a poo appeared in the bath. I remember another member of staff came in and saw the poo and went berserk, then the matron came in and she started calling us filthy dirty children. She was raging and the wee girl started crying.
34. All this time we were sitting in the bath trying to avoid the poo, we were just being left there and the matron kept shouting at the staff to leave us until we said who had done the poo.
35. Eventually the member of staff who put the wee girl in the bath came back in and we were all taken out. We then got ourselves dried, I remember the room was freezing, and then it was staff that cleaned out the bath.

Leisure

36. We had toys and games and we did have time to play and there was an area at the back of the home where we could go out and play. I don't have many memories of that.
37. Everything was shared, all the toys. You weren't allowed any of your own and you weren't allowed any possessions in your room.

School

38. A lot of the kids from Rhu went to the local school. They had to run there and a teacher, who was a man, would cycle along beside them. The kids that went to the school were away all day and came back at teatime.
39. [REDACTED] was too wee for school and I went to a wee room in the building at Rhu. I had a teacher but I don't remember too much about it.
40. There were about six of us in this wee room and it was alright. We didn't get that much of an education when I think about it, but we did have lessons and I remember colouring in and writing letters home.
41. We wrote letters home every week. The teacher would write up on the board what we were to say in the letters. Things like 'we'd had a nice day' and 'we'd been out walking', all things we hadn't actually been doing, or that I never remembered doing.

Clothing

42. The clothes were all provided for us by the home. I remember when it was time to go home they would bring out our own clothes and give them to us.

Healthcare

43. I don't remember seeing a doctor or a dentist at Rhu but I was only there for about two months. I had been in hospital before but there was never any visits or check-ups, nothing I remember.

Chores

44. I don't remember doing much in the way of chores. We did do some things, like keeping our own space tidy and our beds tidy but that was really about it.

Visits

45. My gran and my father came up to visit us once and they took [REDACTED] and me out for the day. I remember we went into Helensburgh and spent the day there. It was a good day and they bought us sweets and things.
46. I remember travelling back to the home on the bus with my dad and my gran after a day out in Helensburgh with them and with [REDACTED]. I remember two staff from Rhu got on the bus. Well I went rigid when I saw them as I knew who they were. I think my gran picked up on that and went back to my mother and told her we were frightened in there, and that she had to get us out.
47. I wasn't told about that until I was older but my gran definitely noticed something, she said I wasn't talking right and I that I was acting terrible. For quite a time my gran thought there was something going on in the home and she would ask me what was wrong, but I said nothing. I once did say there was a lady at the home but nothing else. I think she took that back with her and spoke to my mum.
48. I think my father came in one time on his own, but he had a bit of a drink in him. I seem to have a recollection of him coming to see me when he had a drink in him. He did come another time with my gran.
49. I remember feeling quite sad when I was returning to Rhu after I'd been visiting my family and I remember going back and asking how long my mum was going to be in hospital.
50. We didn't have any visits from anyone from the social work or anyone who might have been checking up on us, just to see we were okay or anything like that.

Running away

51. I couldn't have run away because my sister [REDACTED] was there. I couldn't have run away with her and I wouldn't have left her there. It was something I heard kids talk about but I never ran away.

Bedwetting

52. I didn't ever have a problem with bed wetting. [REDACTED] did and I would help look after her when she wet the bed.

Abuse at Lagarie House

53. I remember eating my dinner one day and the matron came in and shouted at the staff to get the plates cleared. I was sitting further up the table and I had finished, so I went down to sit with [REDACTED] and wait for her to finish. [REDACTED] did eat very slowly at times.
54. The matron shouted at the staff and they told her one of the wee ones was still eating, pointing to [REDACTED]. I remember the matron shouted at the two of us to go with her and she yanked [REDACTED] out her seat by her arm and told me to bring the plate.
55. The matron took us through to the kitchen, took the plate from me and banged it down on the kitchen table. She put [REDACTED] in a chair and told me to get [REDACTED] to eat it. I told her that [REDACTED] couldn't eat fast but she shouted back at me and then she grabbed the spoon and shoved a spoonful of food into [REDACTED]'s mouth.
56. [REDACTED] started baulking and I was trying to explain to the matron, but she told me to shut up and continued shoving the spoon of food into [REDACTED]'s mouth. It was a bread pudding or something like that.
57. Then someone came in to the kitchen and told the matron she was wanted on the phone. She shouted at [REDACTED] to get it finished and shouted at one of the maids to make sure [REDACTED] finished the food on the plate.

58. The maid came over, took the plate away and dumped it, washing everything up. Then a few minutes later another woman came in and asked the maid if it had been finished. The maid said that it had all been finished up. I remember that instance.
59. I don't think it was the same night but another instance I remember was when the matron came round checking we weren't wearing our vests and pants. That was a rule, we were not allowed to wear them in bed at night. All our clothes had to be taken off, folded neatly and put in a layer on our chair. It was our dress, then our vest, then our pants.
60. This one night the matron stopped at the bed next to mine and she was shining her torch on the chair. The pants weren't there, so she woke up the wee girl and sat down on my bed. I remember her big backside and having to move over on my bed.
61. The matron was sitting on my bed and she leaned over the wee girl and started smacking her bottom, really smacking her, while she was just lying there in her bed. That was just because she was sleeping with her pants on, and that wee girl got a right leathering. I remember she was crying afterwards, saying she would never wear her pants in bed again.
62. Another night, I got woken up by the matron and she grabbed me and yanked me out my bed. She was shouting at me about my sister and she hauled me down the corridor to ██████'s room.
63. When we got there, ██████ had wet her bed and she was standing shivering, she was only three and a half. A worker had put a fresh sheet on the bed but the matron gave me the wet sheet and told me to go to the toilet and get it washed.
64. I have a lasting vision of ██████ climbing back into bed and looking so frightened as she was climbing in.
65. I went and washed the sheet in the toilets with a big block of soap. They had big double sinks with cold water and I remember I was terrified of beetles and things like

that on the floor. I don't know how long I was in there scrubbing that sheet but someone eventually came in, took the sheet from me, and told me to get back to bed.

66. I remember getting a parcel once and there wasn't much mail came, so it was quite special, if you ever did get mail. A lot of the kids were orphans so they just didn't get any mail at all. The mail was handed out by the matron in a big open room. Everyone would be sitting there and she would call out names and hand out the mail.
67. This one time, we had a parcel and the matron called out my name and said it was for [REDACTED] and me. She then opened up the parcel and there was a letter inside which she started to read. I remember her saying something like "look at this everyone, she can't even spell, listen to how she spells". I can't even remember what the letter said, I just remember the matron mocking how my mother had written the letter.
68. I think there were sweets in the parcel and they just went into a tin to be shared with all the other kids. There were some comics and pencils as well, something like that. I got another letter not long after that one and the matron did the same thing with that. She was saying let's see what been written in this one, and she had the children all laughing at my mum's letter.
69. I remember getting friendly with a girl at Rhu who said [REDACTED] and I were lucky to be going home. She was staying there until she was sixteen. I remember thinking how awful that would have been.

Reporting of abuse at Lagarie House

70. I was always frightened to tell my grandmother about what was going on at Rhu. I was terrified to tell my dad anything as well but he wouldn't have believed me anyway. Then I would still have been going back to the home, so there was no point.

71. I think I told my mum about [REDACTED]'s bed wetting and me having to wash the sheets. My mum wouldn't have known who to go to with anything like that.
72. I do feel my granny picked up on my reaction when the staff from Rhu got on the bus, that time we were heading back there after a visit. It was after that visit, that the matron called me in to see her and she asked me what I had been telling my granny about being at Rhu. She asked me if I'd been telling my granny I wasn't liking it and that I wasn't happy at Rhu.
73. I told the matron I hadn't told my granny I was unhappy. The matron also asked if I'd told my granny that [REDACTED] was crying all the time. I told her I had told my granny that, because [REDACTED] was unhappy and was crying a lot, because she missed her mum. That is all that was said, she just told me to go after that.
74. The staff in Rhu home knew what was going on, they saw what was going on and saw how the matron was behaving, but they did nothing about it. They just went along with whatever the matron did.
75. I think that was partly because she was in charge and the staff had this fear of her but also because it was easier for the staff to stay quiet and keep their jobs, if they just did as they were told.

Leaving Lagarie House

76. I remember when we did leave Rhu it all seemed to be done very abruptly. I just remember doing something one day and a member of staff telling me to go with them. I remember going in to the office and the matron saying to me and [REDACTED] that we were going home that day.
77. I remember she said something nasty to do with my mother, but I can't remember what it was. That was only a matter of days after the matron had called me into her office and asked me about telling my granny things.

78. I definitely think it was all to do with my granny picking up on my behaviour and telling my mum. I think things were put in place to get us home as soon as possible after that.
79. One of the workers came and gave us our clothes and then it all happened very quickly, I don't remember much else about leaving. We were taken back to our house, in Govan, in a minibus type of thing.
80. I remember being so glad to be home. [REDACTED] was crying because she was so happy to be back with her mum. I did tell my mum, after a few days, that I hadn't liked it at Rhu and she told me that my gran had been saying things weren't going right in that home.

Other care / convalescence

81. I can't quite remember all the dates and places I went to, other than Rhu. I get mixed up but I'm fairly certain they were all convalescent homes. There were a few of them and they were all linked to Yorkhill hospital, I'm sure of that.
82. We lived in the city and they said it was good to get out the city so I would go to places in the country or by the sea for the fresh air. I don't remember a lot about the ones that were good, it's more the ones that were bad.
83. I was in care on my own and I was in care with [REDACTED], but I was never in care with [REDACTED], my youngest sister. [REDACTED] was in care with [REDACTED], but I don't remember where or when that was.

Hillfoot Residential School, Milngavie

84. I've mentioned Hillfoot residential school in Milngavie. I was there when I was about nine. [redacted] was there as well. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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East Park Home, Maryhill, Glasgow

90. I was also in East Park Home in Maryhill when I was convalescing, after I'd been in Yorkhill hospital. As far as I know all my convalescing care was linked to Yorkhill. Seco
Secondary Institutions - to be published later

91. I was in East Park Home a couple of times. The first time I was there I was about five

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

92. The second time I went I was about seven or eight. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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Life after being in care

106. When I was older, about eleven I went and lived with my gran for about a year and then I was back staying with my mum in Govan.
107. I left school when I was fourteen, and my first job was at [REDACTED] box making factory. I remember I was called in to the office not long after I had started and I was told I was getting my notice.
108. I liked it there and asked what I'd done wrong, but it was [REDACTED] that had done wrong, as they had employed me when I was only fourteen. I went away until the following Monday, when I turned fifteen and then I got my job back again.
109. I have jumped about with jobs, a bit like my early life. I worked at [REDACTED], then I worked in a hosiery shop, then I went back to [REDACTED] and then I went to do seasonal work at Butlins in Ayr.
110. After that I came back up to Glasgow and worked in [REDACTED] sweetie factory before I got a job working on the buses as a conductress. I also worked in a book binding place but I went back to the buses so I could save money to go to America.
111. I went off to America for a year and worked as a children's nanny. I actually went to America twice and I remember working in a box factory in New Jersey, to save the money to come back home.
112. When I met my husband, [REDACTED], I was working at the Singers factory. I was twenty six when I met him and we married quite quickly, but I divorced him later in life. He had a lovely nature but was a terribly violent man on drink.
113. After Singers I went on to work in the hospitals, as an auxiliary, and then I went on to work with the elderly and do some child minding. I have four children, three boys and a girl.

Impact

114. I remember, years after being at East Park, when I was working in Butlins, I was in the big ballroom one time, Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

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117. My education was affected by being in care. I was hardly ever at school and that's affected my life in every way. In these homes you don't get a proper education, you get a makeshift thing, so that had a major impact.

118. Trust is another thing, especially with Rhu home, as I never trusted adults. I still have that lack of trust and I get told that all the time by people. That's a big thing, having a lack of trust, and I learnt not to trust, when I was a child.

119. I always felt guilty that I had neglected my kids, but I hadn't. They had food, the house was clean and they had clothes, but somehow, in my mind I felt I'd neglected them.

120. I suffered from depression, on and off, for about eleven years. That was in the eighties and I feel my kids missed out on a lot then because I would go off to my bed, suffering from depression and migraines.

121. I have suffered from migraines since I was in East Park Home, that's where I took my first one. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

122. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later
That was my first migraine and I've had headaches all my life, since then.

123. I've been told by people that I'm stressed all the time. I think that's built up over the years and I'm not sure but it might be why I have the headaches.

Treatment / support

124. I have sought counselling a few times. I always put that down to my head being a bit messed up. If things go wrong or start to go wrong, that can quickly take me into a spiral of depression. I've been through a lot of depression in my life.

Records

125. I've never applied for my records but I have always wanted to see them, if it was at all possible. I was told that records generally get destroyed after so long, so I haven't bothered. I would like to know my life though, and it might help answer some of my own feelings about my time in care.

126. As a child I didn't understand what was happening, everything was always moving and happening so fast. As an adult, looking back, you could look at your records and they might help you to understand what was going on during that part of your life.

127. I have been told by my sister [REDACTED], that Birthlink couldn't get any information from the Merchant Seaman's Mission regarding Lagarie House. I am currently trying to get all the records I can, from my childhood, with Future Pathways.

128. I could only get my medical records from 1969 onwards, they didn't have any records prior to then, and my doctors surgery have told me they didn't know why that was.

Lessons to be learned / Hopes for the Inquiry

129. People don't know what goes on in some of these children's homes. That is part of the reason why I have come forward to speak to the Inquiry. Adults think they have control of things but they don't, children have a world of their own.
130. People need to learn how important it is to make a kid feel secure and how important it is to know, that a lot of the time, the kids just don't know. They don't actually know anything.
131. A kid needs to learn to trust an adult and then they will get on better. If a kid knows you and trusts that you're not going to make matters worse, then they'll come to you, but if they don't trust you, that makes matters ten times worse.
132. Adults don't understand a kids world, they don't understand that feeling of insecurity.
133. The Inquiry needs to vet staff that work in care homes well. They need to want to work with children and be there for the right reason Children need to be allowed to speak and they need to be listened to. Children should be allowed to express themselves.
134. I mentioned the letters we wrote, those letters should be sent out as they were written. The children shouldn't be getting told what to write in the letters. That was wrong.
135. Once you gain a child's trust everything will be alright, but it's getting that trust that's the most important thing. They need to know that what they have to say is important.

Other information

136. 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.. .....

Dated.. *20/02/2020*.....