

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PJM

Support person present: Yes, Mick Armstrong (Open Secret)

1. My name is PJM. My date of birth is /56. My contact details are known to the inquiry.

Background

2. There were seven siblings in my family all together. Six girls and one boy. From oldest to youngest it goes , , , me, and . One of my sisters, , has died but everyone else is still alive.

Life before care

3. The reason we went into care was because our mum died. I was three when my mum died. I always thought that I went into care straight after she died. I recently found out that that wasn't the case. Dad looked after us for a year before we went into care.
4. Some neighbours wanted to adopt my two youngest sisters and my dad said "no". Those neighbours then got social services involved. That's when it was decided that the three youngest girls, of which I was the oldest, would be put into care. The others would stay with my dad. I don't remember anything about what my life was like at home with my dad before I went into care. We lived in a few different places before we were put into care.

5. From what I understand we were placed into care because my dad was in the territorial army and was a widow. It was one of the officers there who had recommended that we be placed in a Widower's home. My dad decided that he wanted to place us in a children's shelter until a place came up in a Widower's home. I was four when I was placed into care.

The Shelter, location unknown

6. I don't remember going to the children's shelter. I always thought the shelter was on the High Street but I haven't been able to find out exactly where I was placed. Secondary

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

The Widower's Childrens Home, Corstorphine, Edinburgh

Arriving and background of home

7. I do remember going to the Widower's Children's Home in Corstorphine. I remember we went in a taxi with a woman in a red coat. I don't know whether she had something to do with the shelter or the Widower's home. I went to the home with my younger sister [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] was taken into a nursery at Clermiston. She was just months old at that time.
8. The only early recollection I have of arriving at the home was being taken into the dining room in the basement. I remember seeing what must have been [REDACTED] SNR. I don't know her name. She was sitting at the head of a table with [REDACTED] SNR. [REDACTED] SNR was called Auntie HRF.

9. There were about 26 children in the home. There were two dormitories. One for the girls and one for the boys. I was kept with my sister. We were in the same dormitory but we weren't in beds next to each other. You were placed next to children who were nearer your age. I did see a fair amount of my younger sister [REDACTED]. There were no restrictions there.
10. I was in the home between 1960 and 1966 / 1967. I was there until I was ten or eleven.

Routine at Widower's Childrens Home, Corstorphine

Weekday and weekend routine

11. You would get up in the morning, get washed then get dressed. Then it would be off to school. When we came back from school it was homework time before a play time outside. There was a playground with swings and a seesaw. You would then have your dinner before going to bed at about 7:30pm. There were also baths. We had them a couple of times a week.
12. On the weekends we got pocket money so we could go to the pictures or to the zoo. Sometimes we would just go up Corstorphine Hill. We weren't kept under lock and key. I had very good times at the home.

Staff

13. The staff, most of the time, were good. There were a few members of staff who stayed like Auntie ^{HRF} [REDACTED] ^{SNR} [REDACTED], Auntie ^{HRE} [REDACTED] ^{SNR} [REDACTED], and Auntie ^{PZU} [REDACTED]. However, most of the time the other staff didn't stay long.
14. We were encouraged to call all the matrons 'Auntie'. There would have been about six or seven 'Aunties' at any one time. I don't remember there being any 'Uncles'. I

have spoken to some younger people who were at the home who have said there were, later on, 'Uncles'. That was after I left.

Food

15. The food was alright. Even though you didn't like the food you were made to eat it. If you didn't eat it you would get it the next day. I suppose that was just like any home back then. As far as I was concerned we were well fed and looked after.

School

16. Our school was Carrick Knowe Primary. We used to get called 'Homers' at school. We all got on fine at school though. I used to have my friends at the school. I was allowed to go and visit them outside of school. The staff were good with us at the school. We got the belt there as well but we weren't alone in that at that time.

Learning life skills at the Widower's home

17. I did learn skills whilst I was in the home. ██████ used to help us learn things. I don't remember doing ironing and washing.

Holidays

18. I remember there used to be families who came in to take children on holiday with them. Those families weren't vetted. I remember being taken on these holidays just by myself. Nothing happened to me but I do wonder why they weren't vetted at the time. I have no idea how the families who took other people away came to be taking kids on holiday. I know one of the families who took me away were parents of a kid I was friendly at school with.

Visits from Dad and siblings

19. My dad and my older siblings, especially my older sister [REDACTED], did come to visit us. It was a few years before we visited them at the family home [REDACTED]. I'm not aware of any restrictions being placed on my dad and siblings visiting. The only time I remember seeing my dad getting turned away was one time when I had mumps. I remember he'd been to see my two younger sisters. After that I looked out the window and saw him walking away.

Visits / Inspections

20. I don't recall any social worker involvement. I don't recall ever seeing anybody or talking to anybody. I don't recall there being any inspections. The committee from the home used to come every so often. They wouldn't speak to the children individually. Even after I left, and become involved in some of the charity days for the home, the committee members would cut the conversation when they discovered that I used to be a resident at the home. They didn't want to know after that.

Medical care and hairdressers

21. We would get taken to the doctors and dentists if we were ill or had problems. There was a barber who came into the home to cut our hair.

Abuse*Bed wetting*

22. I used to wet the bed, as did my sister. A few others also wet the bed. We used to get a row and a skelp if we did it. We were usually skelped with anything that was on their feet. If not they used their hands.

Physical abuse

23. One time, in the winter, I was asked to close the curtains in the dormitory. I closed them and then went to my bed. The next thing I knew I was being dragged out of bed. Apparently there had been an apple on the window sill and somebody had taken a bite out of it. I was blamed because I was the one who shut the curtains. That night I was taken around every single one of the staff who was on. I was beaten with whatever was on their feet. I remember one of them had Scholls on. I was battered with that on the backside.
24. The following morning I was in the kitchen and Mrs [REDACTED], the cook at the home who we also called [REDACTED], noticed the bruising down the back of my legs. [REDACTED] took me straight to Auntie HRE [REDACTED] because Auntie HRF [REDACTED] was on holiday at the time. [REDACTED] demanded that something be done about it. I wasn't taken to the doctor at all.
25. Later on Auntie HRF [REDACTED] came back from her holiday. That night a member of staff was sacked. I don't remember the name of the member of staff. I did ask Auntie HRF [REDACTED] the name of the member of staff at a reunion but it just hasn't stuck.
26. Auntie HRE [REDACTED] skelped me that night but she skelped me with her hand. In the early years Auntie HRE [REDACTED] and Auntie HRF [REDACTED] only used their hands. Auntie HRF [REDACTED] did, a few years later, start to use the belt across your hands. It was just like the belt you used to get at school.

Sexual abuse

27. Mr RGV [REDACTED] was [REDACTED]'s husband. He was the full time gardener. We had big grounds. Mr RGV [REDACTED] lived with [REDACTED] in the grounds in a cottage. The cottage was [REDACTED]. He did the gardens but he also did the maintenance in the house.
28. When I was six or seven Mr RGV [REDACTED] started calling me into the cottage from the playground. I would always try and stay as far away from the cottage as possible but

he would always come out. He would call me in then unzip his trousers. He would then put his penis in my mouth. Then he would disappear into the bathroom. He would tell me to stay where I was. He would then come back out and let me leave the cottage. It never progressed beyond that. That's all he did. It happened on five or six occasions over the years. It was always just Mr **RGV**. I don't know what happened with everybody else. The abuse stopped when I was roughly about eight. That was when **RGV-SPO** retired.

29. I always thought it was just me. Thinking back I can't remember anyone else being taken into the cottage. Then again, if you were busy playing in the playground you might not have noticed.
30. I never blamed Auntie **HRF**. I always thought that I wouldn't tell anybody until my dad and Auntie **HRF** had died.

Reporting of abuse

During time in the Widower's Home

31. I could never have told Auntie **HRF** and Auntie **HRE** at the time. Mr **RGV** told me not to say anything. I honestly can't remember what his exact words were but I was told not to tell anybody.

My older sister in Australia

32. My older sister always felt guilty about us going to Widower's because she always felt that she could have looked after us. She would have only been about thirteen or fourteen at that time. After my dad died, but when Auntie **HRF** was still alive, I went to Australia to visit my older sister. My sister asked me whether something had happened. I said "no". I just couldn't tell her. Even after Auntie **HRF** died I still couldn't tell her. I still haven't told her.

Opening up to my husband and brother

33. In about 1992 or 1993, before my dad died, my brother came to visit. My brother went out for a drink with my husband. He told my husband that his niece had been sexually abused by a neighbour. He said that the police weren't going to do anything. When I heard about that conversation it brought it all back to me. That's when I decided I needed to tell somebody about what had happened to me. I told my husband and my brother that I had been sexually abused in the home. I didn't go into the detail of what had happened. I swore them to secrecy and told them that they were never to tell my dad. I then told my brother that he had to pursue the police to prosecute the neighbour that abused his niece. The police never did prosecute though.
34. Later on I did tell my husband exactly what had happened. He then understood, although he didn't ask questions.

At reunions

35. I have been to reunions since I left the home. The subject of the physical abuse was discussed at the reunions but not the sexual abuse. Nobody ever said anything about the sexual abuse. I think that's why I've always thought that it was just me.

Police

36. I told the police about what happened to me in 2016. The police officer I spoke to was called Christine. She was based in Corstorphine but I met her in St Leonard's. I did give Auntie [REDACTED]'s name to the police. I don't know whether Auntie [REDACTED] is still alive.
37. The police officer told me in January 2017 that she was writing up a report but I haven't seen it at the time of giving this statement.

Leaving The Widowers Childrens Home, Corstorphine

38. My time at the home came to an end after the three of us got together and asked dad to take us home. That was when I was about ten. After a while it was allowed and all three of us went back home with dad.

Life after care

39. My life was good after leaving care. Whilst I was at Widower's my eldest sister got married. After leaving and returning to the family home I started to take charge. I did the washing, cleaning, shopping and the ironing. I had been used to looking after the younger ones whilst in care so I just did the same when I went home.
40. I can't remember the name of the primary school that I went to after coming out of care but I did go on to go to Ainslie Park Secondary school. I left there when I was fifteen and took up an apprenticeship in hairdressing.
41. After about six months of the apprenticeship my dad got ill. They first thought it was a stomach ulcer but it was later found out to be stomach cancer. I left the hairdressing to look after my dad. Over the years my sisters and brother left. I was then the last one left with my Dad. I later got married to my husband, [REDACTED].
42. In about 1997 my dad got cancer again. I moved back in with my dad with my husband to care for him but my dad didn't survive.

Contact with [REDACTED]

43. After I left the home [REDACTED] got in contact with the home to find me. I always had a good relationship with [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] wrote to me and invited me to stay with her. We then exchanged letters. That's when I found out that Mr ^{RGV} [REDACTED] had died. After I found that out I went and visited [REDACTED]. I don't think [REDACTED] knew anything about what was going on.

Impact

44. I had boyfriends but I couldn't have sex with them. It wasn't until I met [REDACTED] that I could have sex. [REDACTED] asked me to do 'that' and I just said "no". He never asked again. He just accepted it.
45. Sometimes the abuse would come back to my mind. It wasn't always there but there would be the odd thing that would trigger it. I don't think it has affected me in any other way than that.

Support from Open Secret

46. I came to getting support from Open Secret through one of the former residents in a closed group on [REDACTED]. That's how I came around to contacting Open Secret. Open Secret has been a good support. I think all the help that I've been needing has come from Open Secret.

Records

47. I got my records from the shelter in November 2015. I got my records from the home in 2016. Some of the records are redacted. They aren't great quality and are difficult to read. I'm not satisfied with my records. I don't think everything is there. There's not a lot there and I can't read what is there. They're very faint and not great quality.
48. I remember seeing my records when I was in the home. I remember Auntie [REDACTED] HRF having the records in front of her. I saw the phrase 'not for adoption' on the records. I know that that phrase doesn't feature in the records that I have obtained so they can't be a complete copy.

Other information

Contacting the Inquiry

49. One of the former kids in the home, [REDACTED], came back from America for a reunion. I wasn't able to go because I was working. A couple of days later I found out that there was a closed group for former kids of the home on [REDACTED]. I was invited to join. When I joined the group I noticed that a couple of members of the group had posted messages about sexual abuse they suffered whilst in the home. They didn't provide details about the abuse. Then I noticed that a couple of members, who were kids at the home at the same time as me, were saying that it was a load of lies. That's when I said that it happened to me and that these people were not liars. I hadn't heard about their abuse at the time of me being in the home but they had mentioned it in this group. I wanted to say that they weren't liars. That's when I decided, when I heard about the Inquiry, that I couldn't continue to keep quiet. I decided that enough was enough and I was going to talk about these things now.
50. 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... [REDACTED] PJM

Dated..15-05-17