

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PLC

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is PLC and my date of birth is 1966. My contact details are known to the inquiry.

Background

2. My mother died in her sleep of a cerebral haemorrhage before I was one year old. My dad just couldn't look after us so we got put in to care. I had two older brothers; and and a big sister; . I was put in to Clerwood Children's Home. and went in to the Widowers' Home. Both my brothers and my dad are now dead.

Clerwood Children's Home, Clermiston Road, Edinburgh

3. I can tell you from my records that I went in to care at the age of ten months and as far as I am aware it was arranged by the social services, but I am not sure if my dad had to pay. I was there from 1967 to 1968 and I would have been about two years old when I left. I have no real recollection of my time there. I know that from there I went to the Widowers' Home but I don't know why I was moved.

Widower's Home, 235 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh

4. Widowers' Home was set up as far as I am aware for motherless children. There were probably about thirty children at any one time living there, and we were split in to dormitories. There were maybe nine or ten in my dormitory and they were all girls. I think my dad paid for me to be at Widowers' but I am not sure.
5. Me, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] went to the Widower's Home. I was about two years old. I remember some of the staff who were there. There was Miss HRF [REDACTED] who was SNR [REDACTED], RHJ [REDACTED], HRE [REDACTED] and ZRGO [REDACTED]. Miss HRF [REDACTED] lived there and had her own bedroom, sitting room and office. We used to call the carers 'aunties'. I don't think they would have all been there at the same time as they would have worked shifts. There wasn't a particular auntie who looked after me.
6. Some of the staff were just silly wee lassies and it was like they had just left school. They didn't have a clue how to deal with children, and none of them probably had their own children. Some were a bit older and had probably been there a long time. Some of the staff had been brought up in the home as children in care and were now working there.

Routine – Widowers' Home

First Memory

7. I think my first memory of being in the Widowers' Home is getting beaten with a shoe by one of the aunties in the home. I don't remember how long I had been there when this happened. I can't really remember much about my time there before I was old enough to go to school.

Mornings and bedtime

8. The dormitory was horrible because it was set up like a jail and it wasn't very homely. We had covers initially then later on I got a duvet. The staff used to get us up in the morning. There was another girl beside me called [REDACTED]. I didn't really get on with her.

Food

9. The food was okay at the Widowers' home and as far as I am aware we got enough food to eat. They used to tell us that if we didn't finish the food that was on our plates we would get it served to us at our next meal. I don't remember if they ever did do that but I was sick once because I forced myself to eat something. We used to raid the cupboards when we were hungry but most of them were locked so we could only really get anything that was left in the fridge. We got toast at supper time before we went to bed, but if you were being punished for doing something you wouldn't get anything and would get sent to your bed without it. I remember being in the kitchen and seeing the cook Mrs [RHV] flick her cigarette ash into the custard.

Clothing / uniform / haircuts

10. We had our own school uniform, and we had a nice set of clothes to wear on Sunday. Our names were sewn into them. Most of our clothes were hand-me-downs and I don't really know where they came from but they had been somebody else's clothes, probably charity shop clothes. When you grew out of your shoes you got second hand ones. You never got new ones. We never got taken to the hairdresser. A barber used to come into the home and cut your hair. We all had the same haircut and it looked like they put a bowl round your head and it was like a statement to the world so everyone knew we were from a home.

Washing / Bathing

11. When I was young all the younger ones had to wait together in the queue for their turn to have a bath. There were two baths in one bathroom and there was no privacy. There were boys waiting there too. The boys might have used the other bath from the girls, but I am not sure. There were two of us in each bath at the same time. There was another bathroom where the older ones washed. Staff were usually there with us I think.

School

12. I went to Carrick Knowe Primary School but I can't actually remember any of my time there or about my education. The only person I remember from school was Miss RFQ [REDACTED] who was SNR [REDACTED] of the school, and she was also on the committee for the Widowers' home. At school she used to take me in her office and slap me on the back of my legs but I can't remember why. My legs were red. I then went to Forrester High School and I was bullied there by the other children because I was a 'homie' meaning I lived in a children's home. Back at Widowers' none of the staff ever sat down and helped me with my homework.

Chores

13. When I was older I would get sent to the shops on a Saturday to get bread and milk, and sometimes it was to get as many as ten loaves of bread. The other jobs we got was peeling loads of potatoes, polishing shoes and doing the Brasso on the gate.

Leisure time

14. The boys and girls used to play together with the toys in the play room. There was another sitting room where the older girls and boys used to go to. I can't remember if there were any books or magazines to read or music to listen to. There was a large area outside at the back of the home where we could play. We had little to play with and if we were bad we got nothing. We did get a little pocket money unless we were

bad in which case we didn't get any. We were allowed to go out to the shops nearby but sometimes if we bought sweets the staff would just take them off us when we went back in.

Trips / excursions

15. I never went on any trips or holidays when I was at Widowers' home, and if ever I went anywhere it was with the school. At school holiday time there was absolutely nothing arranged for us and it was rubbish. Some of the children went to St Monan's which was another boarding school I think, but I never went.

Birthdays and Christmas

16. I don't ever remember celebrating my birthday when I was at Widowers'. Christmas was good because we used to have parties and I got to see my family. I have only heard recently that it was Hearts Football Club who paid for the Christmas parties.

Bed wetting

17. I was scared to go to the toilet through the night because our toilet was quite far away in the basement and you had to go through all the corridors. It was creepy and scary. Near to us was a staff bathroom and we weren't supposed to use it but I did. You used to get into big trouble if you were caught using it and they would shout at you. I didn't wet the bed but one of the other girls, [REDACTED], who slept in the bed next to me did and I used to have to help her change her sheets. One time I was sick in my bed and I had to clean it up myself. If you didn't change your sheets you would get battered by the staff.

Visits / Inspections

18. Once a year there was a day in the home called 'Pound day'. I have no idea why it was called that but a lot of outsiders came in to the home. People brought in stuff to sell and raise funds for the home.

19. My dad must have come to visit me at Widowers' but I can't really remember and after a while he was stopped from coming because he wasn't turning up. My auntie: my dad's sister, and my cousins visited me a few times. I used to get the bus and went home some weekends and stayed with my dad but not very often. I went between my dad's house and my auntie's who lived a few doors along the same street. My dad was more often than not in the pub. My older brother [REDACTED] and his wife visited me at the home. I don't remember him visiting but I have seen a photograph with them at the home with me.
20. One time when I was at school I must have been off sick for a while because one of the teachers from Carrick Knowe Primary School came to the home and visited me. I can't remember her name but she was really nice.
21. My social workers were Mike Harling, and Pauline McCue. There was another Irish woman but I can't remember her name. My relationship with them was okay but I only ever saw them once every six months when I had a review. I never got a chance to speak to them on our own. I am not aware of any inspectors coming to the home but other people did come in for committee meetings and things like that. They never spoke to me as far as I remember.

Contact with siblings

22. I had most contact with my brother [REDACTED] when I was in Widowers' and I knew he was my brother. I vaguely remember [REDACTED] my sister being in the home but never really had anything to do with her.

Medical care

23. I remember being taken out from under a table once to go to the hospital but I have no idea why I went there. I just remember waking up in the hospital. Another time I was put in the sick bay and I was isolated from everyone. There was a bathroom in there and my meals were brought in to me. I wasn't allowed out of the sick bay, and

the staff came in to see me. I think I may have had measles. I don't remember ever seeing a GP when I was at Widowers'.

Good Experience

24. There was one member of staff ^{zPZX} [REDACTED] who was nice. She worked two days at the home then was off for two days. She took us to her house and it was good. She never hit us and she was one of the nice members of staff.

Religion

25. We used to say prayers before we ate our meals but that was all really and we weren't very religious. We were taken to Sunday school and church every week and that was okay.

Supervision

26. There was no one there for us through the night. If you woke up through the night with a bad dream or something you just had to deal with it. There must have been staff on duty but they must have been away in another part of the building, nowhere near us. If you were messing about though, they would appear and give you a beating.

Abuse - Widowers' Home

27. ^{RHJ} [REDACTED] used to hit me and she was the worst. She was a big tall woman with long hair. I will never forget her. Miss ^{HRF} [REDACTED] would hit me too and so did almost all the staff, either with a leather belt, a blue leather Scholl sandal or with their hands. If you were caught out of your bed at night you would get 'leathered'. You could try and put a book down your pyjamas so it didn't hurt but if you got caught you got it worse. You could also try and pretend you were sleeping so they wouldn't hit you with the shoe.

28. I think I would have been between six and seven years old when I was put in the basement as punishment. It was like a washroom but it wasn't really used and if you were bad you were locked in there in the dark. Quite a few of us were put in there at the same time. We were all scared and screaming our heads off. I can't remember what we had done or how long we were in there for but it seemed like forever. I was in there a few times. I wasn't put in there on my own.
29. Sometimes, if we misbehaved in the home, Miss **HRF** would go mental at us. She would shout at us and I was really scared. Some of the staff would call us little bastards and brats. One night time, I am not sure what it was I had done, but I was taken into the sitting room by Miss **HRF** and so was my friend **[REDACTED]**. She made us both stand with our arms in the crucifix position and holding a book in each hand. I am not sure how long we were standing there but it seemed like ages. Miss **HRF** eventually told us to go to our beds. She often punished me in this way.
30. Another time, I think I had been caught smoking with **[REDACTED]**, and we were called in to Miss **HRF**'s office and to punish us she made us smoke cigarette after cigarette until I felt ill. I wasn't sick but I felt bad. This just happened the once.
31. One Christmas they told us that Santa wasn't coming to us because we had been bad. I am not sure what age I was but I remember sitting there crying. Normally at Christmas we would get all excited and when we woke up in the morning there would be a stocking on our beds. When we woke up this year there was nothing. I went down to the playroom where we were told that we weren't getting anything that year. After dinner we did eventually get some presents. That was cruel. One year I remember I got a puppet on a string, it was Pinocchio.
32. There was a time when I was in the bath where the older ones washed. I was in the bath with my friend **[REDACTED]** when I was maybe eleven or twelve years old and a boy **RKE** came in. He was maybe seven to eight years older than us. He told us that he had been told by **SNR** to come in and wash us. I just remember he touched me and put his fingers where he shouldn't have. This continued for a while but I am sure **[REDACTED]** reported it to staff but nothing was ever done about it. It

continued for a while and then it stopped. Another time RKE picked me up by the throat and called me a little ferret. He hit me quite often. RKE is dead now. He who was in the home and I am still in contact with her occasionally. The staff used to see him hitting us but they didn't do anything about it. My brother used to hit me too when I was at Widowers'.

33. Staff just didn't really bother about us and to be honest we didn't see them very often. They were busy doing other duties like the washing, ironing and cleaning. There was no discipline.
34. The number of children dwindled over the last couple of years I was there until there were only two of us left.
35. Widowers' just wasn't a nice place and I hope it doesn't happen to others. People should be aware of what went on in there because they don't know the half of it.

Leaving Widowers' Home

36. My time in Widowers' improved as time went by. The number of children depleted steadily towards the end of my time there until ultimately there were only two of us left. My brother and sister had been moved from Widowers'. I think was moved out when she was fourteen and she went to live . I am not sure what happened to . Eventually Widowers' closed and I got moved to Polwarth's Children's Home when I was about fourteen.

Lord and Lady Polwarth's Children's Home, Colinton Road, Edinburgh

37. I remember I was quite scared about moving to Polwarth's Children's home. who had been at Widowers' came with me. It was better I suppose because it was far more disciplined than Widowers' home. I had my own room and it was just far

more homely. When I was there I went to James Gillespie's High School and it was fine there.

38. The staff in general were okay apart from Ian Samson who was the husband of the home manager. Once I flipped and I was going mad about something and Mr Samson pinned me to the bed and started punching my arms. I was covered in bruises. He only did that to me that once. Another member of staff Eleanor Conway told me later that I should have reported it but I never did. The only other thing he did was one day we were in the minibus and I must have done something because he made me get out and walk home from Lothian Road.
39. Most of the staff in there were nice apart from Ian Samson. He was just a bit of a bully. He shouted at me a lot. He drove the minibus and did other things in the house. I am not actually that sure what his actual job was.
40. You didn't get new clothes in there, it was just hand me downs there too, so you used to stick out. I ran away from Polwarth's once because I was fed up with it but the police caught me and took me back. I only ran away once.
41. Polwarth shut down so I was moved from there to Moredun Young People's Unit.

Moredun Young People's Centre, Edinburgh

42. When I was probably sixteen Polwarth's Children's Home closed and I was moved to Moredun Family Unit. I can't really say anything about there because I was there for only one or two days **Secondary Institutions** and never went back. **Secondary Institutions - to be published**

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Reporting of abuse

43. When I was at Widowers' I might have said what was going on to the social workers Mike Harling, Pauline McCue and the other Irish woman at the six monthly reviews but if anyone did tell them anything it was just shoved under the carpet. They weren't interested. There was no one else in the home that I could have told or that would have listened to me.
44. I know that [REDACTED] my friend reported to a member of staff what [RKE] [REDACTED] was doing to us in the bath at Widowers' and it did stop. Staff would often see [RKE] [REDACTED] hitting me in the home but he just got away with it and they didn't do anything.
45. The police came to see me some time after my brother [REDACTED] died in 1999. I know that [REDACTED] had been in touch with the newspapers trying to report what happened to him at Widowers' home but they didn't really want to know. The police from Amethyst came to see me maybe in 2000 and I gave loads of statements about our time in Widowers' but I never heard any more about it. He was an Irish policeman and I think he was from Corstorphine police station.
46. I have told my GP some of what had happened to me.

Life after care

47. [Secondary Institutions - to be published] and never went back in to care. I must have been sixteen years old. I stayed with friends or at my big sisters. By then I was with [REDACTED] who I had met when I was at Polwarth's Children's home when I was skiving school. I had two children to [REDACTED], a daughter and a son. I also had a still born baby. The doctor told me that I wasn't ready to have another child and that was why she died. I was with [REDACTED] for seven years but he physically abused me and I ran away. At the end he was chasing me around with a hammer and I thought he was going to kill me. I ended up getting an interdict out against him and I applied for criminal injuries but I haven't heard anything. I haven't spoken to him for years.

Impact

48. What happened to me at Widowers' home deprived me of my childhood. There was no kind face that I could ever turn to. There was no love and affection, the staff just weren't interested. They didn't want to listen to us.
49. After I left care I had a few jobs but as I got older things started coming back to me in my head and I just couldn't cope. I started taking days off here and there and then I decided I just couldn't do it. This was probably before I was 22 years old.
50. Because I had seen Mrs RHV the cook at Widowers' flicking her ash in the custard then make us eat it I can't eat anything with custard in it now.
51. I don't really trust anybody any more. Sometimes I don't want to go out and I stay in the house a lot. I don't socialise very much. I don't really know why that is. I used to get bullied but nothing scares me now and I have been hardened by what has happened to me. I have even been locked up for assaulting the police and I don't even realise I am doing it, I just flip. The police have been at my door and I can't really remember why, loud music or people would say the wrong thing to me, and I vented my anger at the police but I don't know why. I always feel like I am on high alert and ready to react to people if they say the wrong thing. I am also very wary of people that I don't know.
52. I reckon that if it hadn't been for my daughter I wouldn't be here today. I got involved in taking drugs after my brother died, and I got brain scans and treatment after it and I thought I was never going to be the same person again. It was my children that ended up looking after me and they were just young
53. When I was 22 years old I had my first nervous breakdown because all the abuse from Widowers' kept coming back into my head. My children got taken into foster care because none of my family would take them. I have a big family but to be honest I don't really know any of them. I was sectioned in the Andrew Duncan Clinic at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for three months. I got my children back quite

quickly after I got out. I got help after that because they were put in supported nursery care. My children now have nothing to do with their dad.

54. I had another breakdown and got sectioned again in 2003 after I lost my daughter who was still born. I just couldn't cope again.
55. When I was thirty years old I was told by my big brother [REDACTED] that my brother [REDACTED] had abused me. I did remember one time when I woke up at Widowers' during the night and I was in my brother's bed. I don't know if anything happened then. Because of what my brother [REDACTED] had said I questioned [REDACTED] about it one night when we were in the pub. My brother just turned and walked away, and never denied it and that said it all for me. Two weeks later [REDACTED] killed himself and I blamed myself for him doing it. I found [REDACTED] in his house after he had [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. I still have that image in my head. That was in 1999. I still don't really know the truth. I have never been the same again since I found [REDACTED].
56. I don't sleep well, maybe a couple of hours here, and a couple of hours there. Sometimes I only fall asleep when I should really be getting up. I haven't worked for years. I just feel mentally numb after everything that I have been through. I am really stressed and I have the scars on my head to prove it through scratching.
57. Both my brothers are now dead. I was never close to my sister [REDACTED] because we didn't grow up together and I don't have anything to do with her now and don't even think of her as my sister.

Treatment / support

58. I have never been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or anything like that. I have asked the doctor for sleeping tablets but he won't give me them. I am currently on anti-depressants.

Lessons to be learned

59. Things should be done to stop things from happening to children in the future. They must listen to the children who have suffered. There should be more set up to help children when they leave care.

Records

60. I got help from Mick at Open Secret to get copies of my social work records. They were all printed but they were rubbish, and weren't even worth getting. I couldn't make any sense of them. It didn't seem to be about me, more about social workers and meetings. There was nothing about me being in there or how I was dealing with life on a day to day basis. It did cover my time in all the homes but just small paragraphs. I just destroyed them.

Other information

61. My brother [REDACTED] told me before he died in 1999 that he had had a sexual relationship with PZO [REDACTED] who was one of the aunties at Widowers' home, when we were actually at Widowers'. [REDACTED] was only a minor at the time, probably about thirteen or fourteen years of age. He also told me that the staff were abusing him.
62. I can't understand why Widowers' let me home at the weekends to stay with my dad. In my social work records it says that my dad was schizophrenic yet they still allowed me home. My dad was scary. He talked German, and he always talked about the war and his time in the concentration camp. He had a nervous breakdown at one point and he was always drunk. He was an aggressive drunk and would smash things up but he never hit me. I did see him hit my brother [REDACTED].

63. I do not need to be kept anonymous and am quite happy for my name to be published. I am happy for my information to be shared with other organisations and any abuser I have named in my statement to help the Inquiry.

64. 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..... 25 / 4 / 2017