

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PTA

Support person present: No

1. My name is PTA. My date of birth is 1952. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before going into care

2. I grew up as a farmers boy and stayed with my parents in Drumblade. I had a younger sister who died about ten years ago. I also had an older sister who died when she was about 10 years old. She died when I was in Coblehaugh and no one there told me of her death. I did not find this out until I returned home to my parents.
3. As a young boy I had chores on the farm. I would get out of bed between three thirty and four o'clock in the morning. I would bring the cows in for milking and feed the pigs. My sister's job was to see to the hens and the sheep. After feeding the animals I would be back at the house for breakfast and change for school.
4. By the age of seven I was driving the tractor on the farm and by ten year old I would operate the combine. There were times when I would be stopped by the police as a youngster, as we transferred the grain from the fields. They would joke about asking me for my licence and then speak with my dad who was driving behind.
5. If I ever did something bad with family I would get a slap on the backside. I had no issue with that as I had done something wrong and was punished for it. My view is that it did not do me any harm and kept me in line.

6. I went to [REDACTED] School when I was about four and a half years old, between nine and four. I went to school but did not really enjoy it. When we got home we would change and see to the animals.
7. If I was out of order at school I would get the strap. I had no issue with this as I was wrong and being punished for being wrong. Sometimes I would get detention at school and be kept in until after four thirty. I would fall out with the teacher telling them I had the animals to see to. I would be given the strap again.
8. Although I did not enjoy school much, there was some fun. We would be allowed to play with the ball in the playground and sometimes it would go over the fence into the British Telecom yard next door. Each year we did our bicycle test at school.
9. My sister [REDACTED] and I would often run away from school. We went to neighbours who would take us in. They would then get in touch with mum and dad and we would be taken home.
10. The school would often be off during the winter because of the snow and we would learn to ski. There were plenty of steep fields and the slopes in the park to ski down.
11. It was a happy childhood other than when I had issues with my health. I was always soiling myself. I could not tell when I needed to go to the toilet. Despite being taken to doctors they did not find out what was wrong until I was older.

#### **Coblehaugh Children's Home, Inverurie**

12. I was taken to Coblehaugh Children's Home when I was about twelve and a half. I think it was my school who got in touch with the local health board. They informed the social work and had me transferred there because of the soiling.
13. Marjorie Urquhart, senior social worker took me out of the school. She took me to my house to pack some clothes, but mum and her fell out. Mum brought out her shotgun and threatened Marjorie if she tried to take me away. Marjorie left, but returned a

short time later with the police. My dad arrived home and they had to allow me to go to the home.

14. There were no previous meetings with my parents. As far as the social work were concerned the soiling was enough for me to be taken from my family home. They claimed it was neglect.

#### **Routine at Coblehaugh**

15. Coblehaugh [REDACTED] HAK and his wife HAF, HAK was only there at nights and weekends. You never messed with him . If you did he would give you a backhander and knock you across the room.
16. RDX was an assistant or house keeper there. If you caused her any issues she would slap you.

#### *First day*

17. When I was there the bedrooms were all on the first floor. There were four beds in my room which I shared with other boys. Some of the girls had similar rooms and some had single bedrooms. I think there was about twelve of us staying there at that time.
18. On the first night along with two of my roommates, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (can't recall the surname), we ran away. We hitched a lift to the A96 and were picked up by a driver and ended up at [REDACTED]'s grans. She fed us but got in touch with the police and we were returned to Coblehaugh.
19. Miss Mitchell, another senior social worker, had a car and picked us up along with Marjorie Urquhart. Miss Mitchell would drive and Marjorie would sit on the back seat with us. While in the car Marjorie would batter us. She never hit us in the face it was always about the body and legs. She was a nasty piece of work. She was a big woman, over six foot tall, built like a wrestler and had hands like shovels.

*Mornings and bedtime*

20. We woke about six thirty and went downstairs and were checked by HAF and RDX. We had breakfast at seven which consisted of porridge, bacon and eggs with some orange juice. The food was always good.
21. We had a bath each night. The bath was available any time after seven thirty until about nine fifteen, when we were expected to be ready to go to bed.
22. Bedtime was usually around nine thirty pm and we would be climbing out the window by ten fifteen. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and I left while one lad was happy to stay. We stayed out all night and were back by early morning. I would get battered by Marjorie for being out. I told her to remember that one day I would grow up and I would get my revenge. That didn't stop her hitting us.

*Food*

23. We would have lunch at school which was usually cooked by Mrs McGraw and Mrs Thompson, Eric and Louis Grieg or sometimes the head cook Maggie Stewart. The food was always good and I never had any issues with it.

*School*

24. Before going to Coblehaugh I attended [REDACTED] school. Whilst at Coblehaugh I attended Inverurie Academy. It was always the same four of us who walked to school each day. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. We were supposed to be in early for prayers but were always late. We got the strap for our troubles.
25. I would leave the academy regularly and visit my mum. I would always be back before home time and mix with the other kids, hoping no one would notice.

*Birthdays and Christmas*

26. There was never anything for birthday, not even a cake. We were told it was too expensive. Christmas was celebrated at school where we would be given a present, but nothing at the home. The most we got on Christmas morning was a "Happy Christmas". We did have Christmas dinner with turkey and all the trimmings.

*Visits/Inspections*

27. Mum and dad would visit most weekends and sometimes bring my sister. It was around sixteen miles from our house to the home and they would travel by bus.
28. The senior social worker would usually be there at least twice a week to check on us. This increased to every morning as we were running away. Each morning she would arrive and she would batter us.

*Healthcare*

29. Because I soiled myself, a nurse would call at Coblehaugh every afternoon after school and I would be given an enema. One occasion I had a bad blockage and she pushed the tube too far up and everything shot out and covered her.
30. After about five months in Coblehaugh things got so bad I tried to commit suicide. I [REDACTED] but luckily the driver saw me at the last minute [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
31. I had my first heart attack between fourteen and fifteen while I was staying at Cobblehaugh. I was on the footpath watching the salmon jumping in the river by the bridge. I slid down and hit my head on the pavement. A passing driver saw me and called the ambulance. I woke up in [REDACTED] Forresthill hospital and I was there for three months. When I got back [REDACTED] HAK tried to make peace but I was not interested. I blamed them and the pain from the abuse for bringing the heart attack on.

32. I was sent to the mental asylum at Ladybridge. I was referred there as a mental case for soiling myself. I spent about three and a half months there. The first night Dr Ross tied my wrists and took me to the padded room upstairs. After a while he gave me a kids book to read. I threw it away telling him I was too old for it. He gave me an autobiography instead and I was quiet for a long time. That first night I was in the padded room between twelve and fourteen hours.
33. The following morning I was taken out of the room by another doctor. He was concerned I was looking very pale. I told him that would be because I had not been fed or given any water. He arranged for me to be get some food and transferred me to ward seven.
34. Dr Clark at the mental asylum came to see me and told me that I was not mentally ill. I told him I knew that. I was taken to see a doctor at the special trauma unit at Woodend Hospital and I explained to him that I was unaware when I needed to go to the toilet and this was why I was soiling myself. I actually felt quite safe as no one was abusing me. I could wander around the hospital and no one would hit me.
35. They arranged for me to have a barium meal and the subsequent x-ray showed that I had been suffering from a partially paralysed bowel. I had an operation to repair the damage. Since the operation I have had no issues other than I am prescribed Dicolax to alleviate any blockage problems.
36. I was discharged from the hospital on the Friday and returned to Coblehaugh. On the Monday I saw Dr Gill and I asked him if he had anything to say about telling everybody I was just lazy, that I had something really badly wrong with my bowel and he should have found this out. He just sat there without saying anything. I walked out and spoke with Mr White, the social worker, and he arranged for me to be transferred to a different doctor.
37. Mum and dad were not even told that I was in Ladybridge. Every time they tried to visit they were told I was otherwise engaged elsewhere. Eventually my dad was

going mad and told the staff that he was not listening to their rubbish and wanted to see me.

38. When I got back to Coblehaugh I told my mum where I had been staying and was asking why I had not seen her or dad. She explained about HAK and HAF hiding it from them.

### **Abuse at Cobblehaugh**

39. If you did anything wrong at Coblehaugh you would get a back hand across the side of your head by HAK or RDX. HAK would be there at the weekends and if he battered you, you would land across the other side of the room. RDX would hit you if she got any back chat.
40. Marjorie, senior social worker, tried to be really clever when she was battering us. She would avoid hitting you on the face or anywhere that could be seen. She would hit you in the guts a lot.
41. One time after running away we were caught by the police and I was still in pain. The police officer asked me to open my shirt. I told him I couldn't and if I did I would be battered. Eventually I opened the shirt and he saw the bruising. He asked who had done that to me and I told him it was my social worker. He told me we were going nowhere that night and he got us some food.
42. When Miss Mitchell came to collect us he refused to hand us over to her. They asked her about the wounds and she denied everything. They told her we had been separated and all gave similar versions of events. The police reported this but other than a short suspension there was no other punishment.
43. She turned up at the home a few days later and told us to go to the room. When she got us in there alone she battered each of us and HAK just stood at the door and watched. I shouted at him to stop her but he just stood there and said he never saw anything. I tried to go for him but [REDACTED] dragged me back.

44. After my operation I still got back handers from the staff for being cheeky. The senior social workers still hit me but it eventually tapered off.

### **Leaving Coblehaugh**

45. After leaving Ladybridge I was returned to Coblehaugh for around eighteen months. I was then transferred to a half-way house at Cults, [REDACTED] ETX [REDACTED] and his wife. ETX [REDACTED] used to take me to the pub before I reached eighteen. He was alright and never hurt me.
46. After about three months at Cults I was allowed to return home and stayed with my family on the croft.

### **Reporting of abuse at Coblehaugh**

47. I reported the abuse to the police and most of them never believed a word I said. It was reported to the social work but as that was Marjorie it was pointless.
48. The first time I ran from the school I went to my aunt [REDACTED]'s house. My mum came and saw I was in pain. I showed her the bruising. I tried to tell her I fell but she knew I was lying. I told her that Marjorie Urquhart had beat me. She marched down to the social work office with a shotgun. She smacked Urquhart for what she had done to me. The police were called and they sent mum away. They called at the house about a week later. They told us Marjorie Urquhart had been suspended for a couple of days but was now back at work.
49. It didn't matter who I reported this abuse to nothing stopped her. She kept coming back to the home and found any reason to beat me and other kids there. I kicked her once in the shins with steal toe cap boots, but she just battered me again for kicking her.

50. Another social worker Mr White came to the home regularly. During one of the visits I told him I was in agony. Mr White took myself and two other boys to see Dr Gill. Dr Gill's answer was that the injuries could have been from falling or playing in the trees. I tried to tell him to get something done but he refused, claiming it was not his jurisdiction.
51. My uncle [REDACTED] and aunt [REDACTED] came into the surgery and saw us sitting there. [REDACTED] asked what was wrong and I told him we were being checked for the bruising. After I finished with Dr Gill [REDACTED] came back and took me to his flat for a cup of tea. He did not like me being in the home and I told him what was happening
52. When I got back to the home [REDACTED] was shouting at Mr White for allowing me to go to [REDACTED]s. I told her it was family but she did not believe me. I got in touch with [REDACTED] and told him [REDACTED] did not believe he was family and she thought I was there to be abused.
53. He came to the home with my aunt [REDACTED] and thumped the door. He told [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] that he was my uncle. He threatened [REDACTED] that if he did not stop hurting me he would pick him up and throw him through the window. It stopped for about a week and then started again.

#### **Life after being in care**

54. I started work with British Rail after my dad put a recommendation in for me. I would have been about fifteen and started as a toilet and carriage cleaner, then as one of the [REDACTED] on the trains. I passed my PSV and HGV driving tests when I was twenty one and became a driver on the railway. I stayed with the railway for many years and still feel I am a railwayman through and through. I have also travelled across Europe as a shopfitter and trained as a joiner.
55. I met and married my wife when I was eighteen years old. I remained married for thirty one years. The last three years were the worst. I had a son to that relationship

but he died when he was nine years old in 1987. He was shot in the head with in air gun and the man responsible only received twelve months probation.

56. I also have a daughter [REDACTED]. She is twenty eight years old but I do not have any contact with her. The last I heard from her was about a year ago when she needed money for a mobile phone. I have not seen or spoken to her since.
57. My marriage was not great and I suffered a lot of domestic abuse from my wife. I came home early from working in London and found her in bed with another man. We separated and I got my own place.
58. About eight months later I came home and found my new place was flooded. After checking with neighbours I was informed that my ex-wife and her partner had been in the house. I contacted the council and for my safety was re-housed in a different county.
59. My ex-wife ended up hitting me with a hoover and attempted to murder me. I do not recall much of the details as I woke up in the hospital three months later with no memory of the incident. The police informed me of the details. She was sentenced to twelve years in prison and died there, after only two years, in 2000.

### **Impact**

60. I had a really good upbringing from my mum and dad and was never quick tempered. I will no longer sit back if anyone threatens to hit me and have a quick temper. I tried to join the Royal Navy but because of my illnesses was not able to enlist.
61. There was an incident on a train when I worked the railways. There were a couple of lads giving the train guard some abuse because they had not paid their fare. I couldn't sit back and tried to intervene and one of them stabbed me in the neck.

- 62. I believe all the abuse, the pain from punching to my guts as the cause of the issues with my heart. The first heart attack I suffered at fifteen and I had a pigs valve fitted. The next attack at twenty three and again at fifty five. I am permanently banned from driving because of this. My last heart attack was three weeks ago.
  
- 63. As a result of my operation I now have a metal plate fitted in my bowel. You don't know notice or pay attention to it until you are going through the scanners at airports.

**Records**

- 64. I have been in touch with the social work to try and obtain my records. To date they have not responded to my requests.

**Other information**

- 65. I have not asked or received any counselling for the abuse. I have been in touch with Future Pathways and been given some help recently. I am due to have more meetings to see if there is any other assistance they can provide.
  
- 66. 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..... PTA [Redacted Signature] .....

Dated..... 22/11/17 .....