

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PRN

Support person present: No

1. My name is PRN though I prefer to be called PRN. My date of birth is 1959. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Peterhead. I don't know my parent's names and all I know, from what my sister told me, is that my mum remarried and later died in Edinburgh. My dad may have been called and died in a mental institution.
3. I am the youngest of four siblings. My brother would have been 64 now but has since died. My sister is 67 or 68 and my sister was the oldest but died when she was in her twenties, about five years after I left care. and were always close to each other and I was always closer to .

Aberdeen Children's Shelter

4. I think we were all put in care because one of my parents was an alcoholic and couldn't look after us and I believe either me or my brother were found wandering the streets and somebody reported it, so I suppose neglect was the reason.
5. From records I know I was admitted to Aberdeen Children's Shelter on 1961 when I was about sixteen months old. I was there for about a year but have no recollection of even having been there.

7 Strachan Cottages, Tarland

6. Records also show that I was in 7 Strachan Cottages, Tarland from [REDACTED] 1962 until [REDACTED] 1969 but, again, I have no real memory of this place. My sister [REDACTED] was also there and most of what I'm aware of from that place comes from her. I didn't really get back in contact with [REDACTED] until I was in my twenties.
7. I recently walked by the place to see if it would stir any memories but all I noticed was that the school was further away than I remembered and I don't even recall [REDACTED] being in Tarland.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

8.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

On [REDACTED] 1969 I was moved to Coble Haugh Children's House in Inverurie where I stayed until [REDACTED] 1978.

Coble Haugh Children's Home, Inverurie

9. Coble Haugh was for boys and girls aged from six or seven up to eighteen. There would have been anywhere between 20 and 25 kids in the home at any one time. It [REDACTED] by HAF-HAK [REDACTED] who we called Aunt HAF and Uncle HAK. Aunt HAF was SNR [REDACTED] and was in the home full-time while Uncle HAK had a full-time job in Aberdeen as a tax inspector or accountant.
10. I don't recall arriving there but it was up a steep hill and it sat overlooking the river and bridge next to where we went to school. I'm led to believe I was taken there by Marjorie Urquhart who ran a lot of the homes. You would walk up the brae and the place was ten or twelve feet off the road with a front and back door.
11. When you went in the front door there was a laundry room, dining room, a corridor with a bedroom, a playroom and Uncle HAK and Aunt HAF's private room though

their bedroom was upstairs. A staff member called **GTM** had his bedroom downstairs. All the other bedrooms were upstairs on a long corridor with seven bedrooms, two bathrooms and toilets. The girl's bedrooms were at the other end. I think the smallest bedroom held two while the biggest held maybe seven.

12. Other staff members I recall are Mrs Robbie who was the cleaner, Aunt **HDA** and her twin whose name I don't remember, Aunt Jessie and the cook Aunt and her husband **HBA** who was a lovely man. **GTM** was another member of staff. There was another man called **HIC** but I'm not sure if he was a member of staff or not.

13. Uncle **HAK** and Aunt **HAF** also had a house next to the but Aunt **HAF** didn't move into it until after Uncle **HAK** died. He died maybe a couple of years after I left.

Routine at Coble Haugh Children's Home, Inverurie

14. We got woken up at 7:30 am - 8:00 am when the doors were opened by which ever staff were on duty and we all got up at the same time. I seem to recall a bell or a whistle blew to get us up. You weren't allowed to lie on for even five minutes though I remember being able to lie in a bit longer years later when I became an apprentice at fifteen.

15. We would get up, washed, dressed then went to school going passed the old folk's home. When we got back from school we would play football for a while. In the evening we would have our bath then get into our pyjamas and watch TV. We would have a cup of tea before we went to bed the timing of which was staggered depending on your age.

Mealtimes/Food

16. I had no issues with the food and, to this day, those of us that went there talk about a "Cobbler's Meal" of broth, mince and tatties and apple crumble. For breakfast we had cereal or lumpy porridge. You ate what was put in front of you and were punished with a slap if you didn't eat it by either Uncle HAK or one of the other male staff though I can't recall which. In the evening we got things like macaroni or shepherd's pie though I remember that always made the pans hard to wash.

17. We sat at three or four tables that were put together. The adults didn't eat with us. I think we sat where we liked but I'm not sure. At night we got cocoa and a treacle or syrup sandwich. I don't recall ever going hungry. We used dinner tokens to get lunch at school. At the weekends we got lunch in the home. To this day I still eat the sort of food we ate at Coble Haugh.

Washing/bathing

18. We shared a bath and when you were younger there would be three of us in the bath but, as you got older, there would be two until you were old enough to bath on your own. The baths were supervised by whoever was on duty when you were younger and the baths were once or twice a week. We had the baths at night before going to bed.

19. When you got bathed the water wasn't changed for getting in next. It's possible that sometimes the water would be cold if you weren't one of the first in but I can't be sure about that. We would be in a queue like a conveyor belt. I think after a bath you would be in your pyjamas and watch TV.

Clothing/uniform

20. We wore school uniforms that were supplied by the home. We also had casual clothes of jeans and T-Shirts that we would wear around the home. We had shoes for school and were supplied with black gym shoes and slippers.

21. There were cupboards with clothes that kids had grown out of and these were given to new arrivals but school uniforms were bought new out of a shop in Inverurie. As you grew you went to the cupboard where you would get bigger clothes to fit you.

Leisure time

22. We played over in the park kicking a ball about. I was always into football. I was football mad and would play whenever I could. At weekends we often went to the pictures and would spend our pocket-money in the local sweet shops. Weekends were usually fun times though sometimes we didn't get pocket-money if we had misbehaved. I also remember watching things like Dr Who, Top of the Pops and Z Cars on the TV.
23. We also went to the cubs, the scouts, the Boy's Brigade and the Cadets in the evening during the week.

Trips and holidays

24. We went to Huntly every summer where lots of homes sent kids. It was held in a school where the classrooms had been set up as dorms. Those were generally happy times. There was the odd scuffle between rival homes but there was always lots to do and lots of sports, especially football. I enjoyed it that much that I used to cry when I had to go back to Coble Haugh. Uncle **HAK** and Aunt **HAF** didn't go to these camps and it was Marjorie Urquhart who ran them.

School

25. I started in Port Elvinstone Primary School which was just along the road. My teacher was Mrs **HBK** and the headmaster was Mr Nichol. His house was adjacent to the school and I would fetch his wife's groceries for her. I have no issues with my time in primary school.

26. I then went to Inverurie Academy Secondary School where I stayed until 1975. It was over the bridge from the home and about a mile away. I don't recall passing any exams and left before I turned sixteen in 1975. I was strapped by various teachers and there was a metal-work teacher called Mr ^{RDN} who used to throw things at you. That was just the way it was in those days, it was an accepted punishment. It was especially sore getting strapped when it was cold.
27. During my time in Coble Haugh a lot of the kids in the secondary school didn't take to us from the home. There were a couple of guys called [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and on one occasion I got slapped from them and their gang. This was actually a regular thing. A lot of the other kids didn't have ties and when we were out of sight of the home we would take our ties off to try and blend in with the others.

Healthcare

28. My memory of health care was being naked in a room with a doctor, Aunt ^{HAF} and Uncle ^{HAK}. What I look back on and find strange about that was that the curtains were open and the window looked out on to the woods. It wasn't just boys that would be examined like that but girls as well and anybody passing could see into the room. I recall the doctor would make you cough and hold your testicles. You were seen one at a time but I still don't understand why we were naked. I think that happened every year.
29. I don't recall a doctor coming in regularly though I think they came in for things like measles or mumps. My recollection is that I was quite a healthy child. I have no recollection of going to see a doctor so I assume they came to see us.
30. Similarly with dentists, I think they came to the school in a van to see us rather than us going to see them

Religious instruction

31. We were all marched to church every Sunday at St Andrew's Church in Inverurie. Then we would go into the Mission in the hall next to it. I think we also went there one night during the week. When we went to church we would all be dressed in our Sunday best. We also said grace before each meal.

Chores

32. There was a rota for sweeping up or doing the dishes and I think the rota was hung in the kitchen or in the hall. Mrs Robbie cleaned the bedrooms. The dishes were done after supper and we used to have to sweep up the goose poo which was done whenever you felt like it as a lot of us just liked being outside. It was very much a regime and you did the chores as and when it was your turn.

Birthdays and Christmas

33. Certain charities, like The Round Table, came at Christmas and gave us presents. To this day I still get more pleasure out of giving presents than receiving them. I seem to recall that somebody would dress up as Santa. They also sang carols and I think we had a Christmas dinner. I remember Christmas as a happy time.
34. I'm sure birthdays were celebrated and we would get a present that had been donated. I think any presents we got would be put in a cupboard the next day and we would get to play with them if we had been good. We would then take them into the playroom which also had a piano that I learned to play a bit.

Visits/Inspections

35. I believe that both my dad and my brother [REDACTED] tried to visit me but weren't allowed to. I think it may have been because my dad was an alcoholic and I'm led to believe that my brother [REDACTED] was starting to show his homosexuality which the home didn't

wish to encourage. [REDACTED] was much older when he came to visit and I could actually see him but we weren't allowed to speak to each other.

36. Marjorie Urquhart was head of Social Work and sometimes came along if there was anything happening, like if somebody had run away or if somebody had a panel coming up. She may have spoken to me on the occasions I ran away but I'm not sure about that. I personally always believed that she was a children's person and cared about them but I'm sure I told her about Uncle HAK. She was usually the person who brought new children into the home.

Sibling

37. The only times I saw my siblings was that sometimes I saw my brother [REDACTED] at summer camp. He would be there with kids from another home. The only other time we all got together was at my sister's wedding. I've got a photograph of us all together that day which is one of my favourite possessions as it's the only one of us all together. To this day I don't understand why we were all put in different homes.

Running away

38. I was about fourteen when I ran away with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They stole a car and we got stopped by the police in Perth. Because they were older they got the blame and were basically accused of leading me astray, though truth to be told, I went with them willingly. I didn't get punished officially for that but I'm sure that was a night that Uncle HAK battered me.
39. Prior to running away we had all been in GTM [REDACTED]'s room and he had me, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] smoking dope and blowing the smoke out a window in his downstairs bedroom. This would have been in 1974.
40. GTM [REDACTED] was a member of staff and I was told years later by HIC [REDACTED] that GTM [REDACTED] was only there as a result of a community court order in Liverpool sending him there. I'm also led to believe that the home was later raided by the police for drugs.

41. I am sure there were two other occasions that I ran away with another boy and on one of those occasions a farmer, whose door we knocked on, either took us back or got the police to take us back. I'm sure I told them why I had run away and asked them not to take me back. I'm not sure how old I was at those times.

Bed Wetting

42. I wet the bed. When you did you got punished by getting a slap though I don't recall by who. On occasions they also wiped the wet sheet in your face. This happened to me and others on several occasions. It got to the extent that you would be scared to go to sleep in case you wet the bed. I have this recollection that Mrs Robbie, the cleaner who stayed in the village and was a lovely woman, would come in and if she saw you had wet the bed would try and cover it up so as you wouldn't get in to trouble.
43. I have this memory that when I went to the camps in the summer, Marjorie Urquhart used to take me to the bathroom before I went to bed and would put water on my privates to try and make me do the toilet. Aunt ^{HAF} used to do the same thing when I was in the home. I'm sure somebody else used to do it as well but I can't recall their name now.

Abuse at Coble Haugh Children's Home, Inverurie

44. Uncle ^{HAK} hit me regularly and on at least one occasion used a belt on me. He would punch and slap all the kids especially when he came back from the pub. There was a bedroom that was on the side of the home overlooking the pub. We would be looking out the window and see ^{HAK} coming up the Brae. I don't want to name the others who were there.
45. I recently met up with a friend called [REDACTED] who had also been in Coble Haugh. I asked him what job it was that Uncle ^{HAK} had, was he an accountant or a tax inspector, and [REDACTED]'s reply was "He was a beater up of kids, that's what he was".

46. On one occasion when I had been slapped by the gang at school I returned home with blood on my shirt and rather than being sympathetic Uncle **HAK** gave me another battering. I was thinking to myself that I couldn't win. I'd get slapped at school and then get slapped in the home for being slapped at school. Uncle **HAK** wasn't even drunk that night. **HAK** often had a bottle of some sort of spirit in his room.
47. We knew on several occasions that it was inevitable that we were going to get a beating off Uncle **HAK**. When we saw him coming up the brae from the pub we would look to our door handles and know that if they turned we would be getting a beating. It was just something we got used to and we could also hear him beating his wife through the walls. That was hard as we could do nothing about it.
48. I have recently met people from the village who, as children, used to come and play with us in the home and their recollection of Uncle **HAK** was that he was a coarse man and a bully. They didn't even live in the home but knew that.
49. On one of the occasions that I ran away the police took me back despite the fact that I asked them not to. When I got back Uncle **HAK** hammered me. I remember that Uncle **HAK** grabbed me in a way that I couldn't defend myself and put his knee into me.
50. There was another occasion that I didn't even remember that my friend **██████████** told me about recently. He said that I had made him laugh one time when we were children and Uncle **HAK** came in and hit us or slap us for it. As I say, I don't recall that but I'm not surprised as it's a typical example of how he would hit us for nothing.
51. If Uncle **HAK** was sober and disciplining us he would usually take us into his private office which we called the punishment room. If he was under the influence of alcohol he would hit you where you stood.
52. **GTM** **██████████** was a member of staff whose bedroom was on the ground floor. One night he had me and two other boys in his room smoking a joint which had dope in it. I was fourteen. I'm not saying that **GTM** **██████████** dragged me into that room or forced

me to smoke the dope but it just wasn't right that a member of staff was giving drugs to somebody of that age.

53. My other complaint about **GTM** is what I've learned since and that is that he had been sent there under a community service order from a court in Liverpool. I can't be sure that that is true but, if it is, then it's a disgrace that such a person was employed there. It was **HIC** who told me this and I've no reason to disbelieve him. **GTM** is now dead.

54. The only other member of staff I would complain about, other than Uncle **HAK** for the beatings and **GTM** for giving me cannabis, would be **HIC** and I'm not completely certain he was a member of staff. Anyway, I have it in my head that he once gave me a beating but I just can't remember the details or be 100% certain that it happened.

Reporting of abuse at Coble Haugh Children's Home, Inverurie

55. I told the police who took me back after I ran away about what was happening in Coble Haugh and I'm sure I told Marjorie Urquhart, the woman responsible for all the homes in the area.

Leaving Coble Haugh Children's Home, Inverurie

56. During My last three years at Coble Haugh I became an apprentice slater/roofer. That was between 1975 and 1978 and I really enjoyed it. I would give my wages to Aunty **HAF** and she opened a Halifax account for me. Earning money meant I could buy the other kids chips at the weekend which I enjoyed doing. By the time I became an apprentice Uncle **HAK** had laid off me, probably because I was so much bigger by then.

57. I knew, because of my age, that I would be leaving Coble Haugh and on the day I left I actually cried as I walked away. Having said that, I had been taught no life skills in

preparation for leaving and anything I learned I picked up as life went on. I moved in with Mrs [REDACTED] who took in lodgers and I believe others who had left Coble Haugh may also have used her place.

58. It's strange but, despite the abuse I got from Uncle [REDACTED]^{HAK}, the first thing I did when I arrived at Mrs [REDACTED]'s and unpacked was to go back up to Coble Haugh to visit people.

Life after being in care

59. After I left care and moved out of Mrs [REDACTED]'s I moved into Aberdeen and I started going to football a lot. I followed Aberdeen FC and at first I would hide my Aberdeen scarf when Celtic and Rangers were in town. However, after years of being bullied the way I had been, I turned full circle and would go looking for trouble. I would go to the roughest pubs looking for the toughest guys to fight and even ended up involved with football groups down in London.
60. I ended up as a night-time supervisor in Safeway for three years but got many a warning about my involvement in football hooliganism. That involvement went on until I received a serious brain injury in 2005 as result of a kicking I took from four guys who I stopped breaking into a house in Devon. After that I didn't leave the house for two years and was diagnosed with depression and PTSD.
61. I was in England for 27 years and met [REDACTED] and her daughters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I was a slater for seven years and then went to sea but missed the comradery of my friends so gave it up which is when I worked in Safeway.
62. I was going back and forth to Aberdeen three or four times a year but eventually moved back there full-time due to my sister [REDACTED]'s poor health. By this time I had accepted what had happened to me in Devon and tried to move on with my life.

Impact

63. It's difficult for me to say what impact my time in care has had on me as I have had psychiatrists and psychologists telling me one thing and me telling myself other things. As far as I am concerned my time in care had no impact on me. As far as I am concerned I was just nuts.
64. I was diagnosed with PTSD after being attacked but experts suggest that I could have had PTSD as a result of my time in care. They are the experts so I would have to go along with what they say despite my own reservations about their diagnosis. However, I want to be clear about the fact that I would never blame my time in care for how my later life turned out, especially my involvement with football hooliganism.
65. I never married or had children and that may have been to do with my time in care. I've always found it hard to form relationships and really prefer women's company rather than be in bed with them. I like going on walks and seeing animals and things like that with women.
66. I suppose my education did suffer because I was in a home. Being in a home lead to me spending most of my time in school in fear because we were bullied by others and that would have to have had an effect on my ability to take in what I was being taught.
67. It's only in my adult years that I wish I could have knocked a door and have it answered by my mum and dad. I wish me and my siblings could have lead a normal life. I've sometimes wanted to take my own life but then I remember that there's a lot of good in my life and a lot of good people.
68. Had the supervision been better, then I think my life would have been better. Marjorie Urquhart was in charge of a lot of the children's homes and I'm sure she knew what Uncle **HAK** was up to but I suppose she was never able to be everywhere at the same time. I'm as close to 100% that she tried to stop what Uncle **HAK** was doing to us but they didn't want to split up Uncle **HAK** and Aunt **HAF**.

Reporting of Abuse

69. I only spoke to my friends about what had happened to me in Coble Haugh in the years after I left. However, the police have now spoken to me twice about it. I first spoke to the police in England after seeing something on TV in about 2008. I think it had something to do with the NSPCC. They must have spoken to the police in Aberdeen and officers came to see me.
70. However, by then Uncle **HAK** was dead and I decided to withdraw my complaint. I didn't see the point of listening to an apology from somebody who probably wouldn't even have been born when Uncle **HAK** was assaulting me.
71. When I moved back to Inverurie in 2016 I spoke to **HIC** who told me about **GTM** and I contacted the police about him. However, the police said that since **GTM** had also died, they didn't want to take my complaint against him any further. That annoyed me because, even though **GTM** was dead, I would like to have known why **GTM** had been put in Coble Haugh under a community order.
72. I was never interested in compensation or punishing anybody as those who were guilty are now dead.

Records

73. Thomson Solicitors were able to get my records but I told them I didn't want to see the records though they did clarify the homes I was in and when I was in them. Thomson Solicitors are suing Aberdeen District Council on my behalf about my time in care. They are representing quite a few people who went to Coble Haugh though obviously I don't know who the other people are.

Hopes for The Inquiry

- 74. I only hope that those who inflicted abuse on children face the consequences of their actions though so many of them have since died. I hope that, by saying what happened to me, it can help children in the future. What happened to me has happened but people must have known what was going on. They can't all be punished but hopefully The Inquiry can ensure that such people cannot stay hidden in the future.

Other Comments

- 75. I don't want people to think that my whole time in Coble Haugh was miserable. It wasn't and there were some good times. As I said, I even cried when I left the place. And I wouldn't have a word said against Aunt ^{HAF} [REDACTED] who was a lovely lady and later was [REDACTED]. My main complaint is against Uncle ^{HAK} [REDACTED] who was a brutal man and it was him who made our lives miserable.

- 76. 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.

PRN
[REDACTED]

Signed.....

Dated..... 22.10.2020