

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PKA

Support person present: Yes

1. My full name is PKA. My name at birth and as a child was PKA. My first married name was PKA and then later became PKA and I am now using the surname PKA. My date of birth is 1963. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before care

2. I was born in Dumfries. I lived on with my parents and. My mum then had my sister, who was a year younger than me, and who was about three years younger than me. Then my brother was born, who was five years younger than me. We moved to when was born because we needed a bigger house.
3. My dad worked at National Tyre Service, fitting tyres and going out to breakdowns to change tyres. My mum was a stay at home mum. Life was fine at home when I was a child. We had quite a good childhood. We were looked after and had meals on the table.
4. I went to Maxwelltown High School. I did well in the classes where I liked the teachers but if I didn't like the teacher, I wouldn't behave in class or do the work. If you were clever, you went to the Academy school, and I didn't want to go there so I would play dumb at school a lot. My sister did the same.

5. One teacher gave me one hundred lines one day when I hadn't even done anything wrong. I went home and drew a hundred lines with a ruler but didn't write out the lines. He pinned them up on the wall.
6. One day me and my friend, [REDACTED] were playing table tennis at school and we were holding the table. I let the table drop so Mrs Warrel chased me around the whole school. I ran and hid in the science block and she came in and shouted, "Has anybody seen [REDACTED]?" I jumped out and shouted "Boo!" at her. I got suspended for that.
7. At home, I would do stupid things like fill the washing machine with the whole box of soap powder, but nothing too serious. I wouldn't behave so my mum chased me up the road one day while holding a knife, which she had been using to peel the tatties. Another time she chucked a bucket of water over me. One time I was smoking in the garden and I put my cigarette in the bin and it went on fire so I got in trouble for that when my mum saw it.
8. My mother went to the doctors about me and said something needed to be done with me because of my behaviour.
9. I had actually been doing well at school in the classes where I liked the teachers. I was good at Maths, English and cooking class. I also enjoyed French if I had the French teacher I liked. I did well in my exams and only failed my French audio exam because I was deaf in my left ear.
10. One day in cooking class at school, the teacher wouldn't let me go to the toilet when I needed to go. I was fourteen years old at the time. I was begging her to let me go but she kept saying no because I would just go out and smoke. She told me to fill the washing machine and I had to run the water to do it, which made me end up peeing myself in class. It was an accident but the teacher thought I had done it deliberately. I was called "Pissy [REDACTED]" at school after that, which was embarrassing.

11. After the incident of wetting myself in class, my guidance teacher got involved and went to see my mum. Social work got involved with me after that. I remember a social worker with long, dark hair coming to see me at home but I can't remember her name. I remember my mum saying to the social worker that she couldn't do anything about my behaviour. The social worker told me that I was going to Merkland Children's Home because I wouldn't behave at school.
12. I can't remember discussing anything with my parents or the social worker. Nobody asked me what I wanted. I didn't want to go to the home but the decision had been made. I was given my tea and then taken to the home that day.

### **Merkland Children's Home, Moffat, Dumfriesshire**

13. I was fourteen years old when I was taken to Merkland Children's Home. The social worker drove me and I had a suitcase of clothes from home to take with me.
14. I don't really remember my first day. I remember going in the big doors to the home, up some steps and into an office to the side where I met Peter Harley and [REDACTED] JDW who were in charge of the home.
15. I remember being shown around and shown where I would sleep, which was a room next to the office. The room I was in had four beds in it and I was sharing with three other lassies. I remember sitting on my bed for a while, crying, because I felt abandoned by my parents and lost.
16. There were quite a few boys and girls in the home but I can't say how many. They were all between about thirteen and fifteen years old. I don't remember a lot of names but I remember another girl called [REDACTED]. I don't know what the other kids were in for because we didn't really talk about it. I remember there was a boy who had been there for quite a long time because I think his parents didn't want him.

### *Layout*

17. It was quite a big place with a lot of grounds. There were stables at the back but I can't remember if there were any horses.
18. When you went in the front door of the building there were steps going up to Mr Harley's office, which was at one side. There was a dormitory beside the office. On that same floor there was also a room with pool tables and a television. There were then some more steps going up to where the boys were.
19. There were three or four floors in the building and there was a little flat right at the top. The kids in the home were not allowed up there. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
20. Then down the stairs was the dining room and kitchen area.

### *Staff*

21. Peter Harley and [REDACTED] JDW were in charge of the home. They were quite old to me at the time and [REDACTED]. He told the children in the home to call him 'pop'. [REDACTED] She was involved with the care of the kids but was out of the home a lot. I don't remember the name of any other staff. I think I have tried to shut it all out.
22. I remember a woman called Mary, who changed the bedding and brought up trays of tea when people visited. She might have done the cooking too but I can't be sure. There was also a gardener.

### **Routine at Merkland Children's Home**

23. We got up in the morning and got showered. I think we all showered separately and had some privacy, but I can't really remember. We got ready for school and had breakfast, then Peter Harley drove us to school in a minibus.
24. After school we came home and stayed in the home for the rest of the evening. We would do our homework then get our tea. We then got some free time when we could sit in the in a room that had a television, snooker table and games in it. I liked to read but I don't remember if we had books or not. We could also go outside in the grounds and to the stables at the back. I don't remember if there were any horses there. We weren't allowed out of the grounds during the week days.
25. Peter Harley would come and tell us when it was bedtime and we then went and got ready for bed. It was at a certain time, but I can't remember when it was. I think maybe about 9:00 pm.
26. At weekends, we still had to get up and out of bed early and have breakfast. We could go to the television and snooker room whenever we wanted. I also remember going to the local café to get a milkshake or a Vimto on a Saturday.
27. We were never taken out on any trips or anything. I was there for three months and we didn't go anywhere or do anything.
28. I never went to the doctor while I was there.
29. I never had a birthday or Christmas while I was there.

### *Food*

30. We got fed things like macaroni and cheese, or sausages. I thought the food was quite good and I liked everything I was given. I can't remember there being any issue with food with the other kids either.

### *Clothing / uniform*

31. I didn't get any extra clothes there. I just had the clothes that I had brought with me from home.
32. The uniform at school was just a black skirt and black cardigan with a white shirt, which was what I had already wore at Maxwelltown High anyway. I was given a school tie for Moffat Academy but otherwise I just wore the clothes that I already had.

### *School*

33. All the kids from the home went to Moffat Academy and we were taken there in a minibus in the mornings.
34. I liked school because it meant we were getting away from Peter Harley. It was a good school and I got on ok there. The classes were smaller than at my school before and the teachers were really nice.
35. We had to do our homework in the evenings when we got back home but I don't remember if we got any help with it.

### *Chores*

36. We had to do chores like making our beds, changing bed sheets and washing dishes.
37. There was a boy who used to dirty the bed. I think his name might have been [REDACTED] but I can't remember. Peter Harley used to go in and make me clean the boy's bed. That happened regularly and I used to feel sick doing it. I don't know why he picked me to do it.

### *Visits / Inspections*

38. My mum and dad weren't allowed to visit me for the first three weeks or something because they wanted me to get settled in. That wasn't nice. They came to see me after the first three weeks but not very often. They brought my sisters and brother with them one time.
39. The social worker used to come once a fortnight or so to see me. She would be in Peter Harley's office and I would be sent for to go and see her there. I would then talk to her in the office in front of Peter Harley. I never spoke to her on my own. I can't remember what we talked about. She never listened to me anyway.
40. All the kids' visits used to be in his office in front of him or JDW.
41. I don't remember anybody else visiting or speaking to me from outside.

### **Abuse at Merkland Children's Home**

42. If Peter Harley thought any of the kids did something bad, he would shout them into his room, get them to bend over and hit them on the backside with a cane or walking stick.
43. The first time my mum and dad came to visit, I met them in the kitchen and I was making them tea. We then started walking up to the room with the television and snooker table. I was carrying the tray with the tea and I tripped on a step, dropped the tray and smashed two cups. It was an accident.
44. I had the rest of my visit with my parents in the television room. I don't think Peter Harley was there but there were other kids there. After my parents left, Mr Harley called me into his office, told me to bend over and he hit me with his walking stick over my clothing. I didn't think it was abuse at the time because I used to get a clip round a lug from my mum at home. Looking back, I think Mr Harley was turned on by it.

45. This was the way Peter Harley punished all the kids. It happened quite a lot and everybody got it. I didn't see it happen to any other children because it would happen in his room in his flat after he called them in. We all knew what was going to happen when they were called in because it happened to most kids quite a lot. We would tell each other about it afterwards as well.
46. JDW was never there when he hit me so I don't know if she knew he was doing this. She seemed quite nice.

#### *Running away*

47. I ran away and tried to get back to my mum and dad's house. Peter Harley came to find me in the mini bus. He found me and took me back to the home to his room. He got me to bend over and hit me on the backside with the walking stick or cane as a punishment for running away. It was sore so I didn't run away again.
48. A lot of the kids tried to run away and I don't blame them. They would get hit in the same way when they were found and brought back.

#### *Sexual abuse*

49. Peter Harley would shout me up to his room in the flat at the top of the building. Nobody else was there when he called me up. He would then be pleasuring himself in front of me and would touch me as well. This started a week after I went into the home and carried on until I left. It happened to me quite a lot. He would tell me not to say anything to anyone and that it was my fault.
50. I thought it was only me it was happening to. I found out later, as an adult, that it was happening to other kids too, including the boys.
51. I think I was quite lucky because he didn't have full sex with me whereas he did with other kids.

52. I have wondered a lot about whether JDW [REDACTED] knew about him abusing the kids. I think she must have as she was running the place with him but I don't know.

### **Reporting of abuse at Merkland Children's Home**

53. I didn't tell anybody about the abuse at the time. I couldn't tell my social worker because Peter Harley was always there when she met me.
54. I told my mum about the sexual abuse shortly after I left the home and she said I was lying and making it up because he wouldn't do that because he looked after a children's home. I just kept quiet about it after that.

### **Leaving Merkland Children's Home**

55. After three months, I was told by my social worker that I was going back home to my parents. I think that was decided because I had been behaving myself in the home, which I had been, because I hated it in there and wanted out.
56. I was only there for three months but it was the worse time of my life.

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

57. I hated my mother for putting me in the home because she was the one who pushed me to be put in there. I never got on with her for ages after I got out of the home. I blamed her for everything and argued with her all the time. My mother apologised to me years later, after I had been to the police in 2012.

58. I saw my social worker for a while after I got home. She was just seeing that I was still behaving. It was really stupid because it wasn't like I had been going round robbing people before I was put in care.
59. I went back to Maxwelltown High School. I behaved at school after leaving the home because I didn't want to go back into a home. I got on well at school.
60. I lived with my mum until I met my partner, [REDACTED] when I was sixteen years old. I moved in with him, got married and we had three kids together.
61. I started work in a supermarket on the checkouts then moved to another supermarket, until I was headhunted back to my first employer. I did well at work and ended up working in the cash office. I had to stop working because I have a degenerative disc disease and my doctor told me I couldn't work.
62. I told [REDACTED] about the abuse in Merkland Children's Home because I was scared of going places on my own and always wanted someone to be with me. He understood and was always with me until he died in 2009 after we had been married for 25 years.
63. I moved to Lockerbie in 2012. I got married again but it didn't last so I stayed with my mum for a while. I then got a flat in Dumfries and that is where I live now. I have a small social circle with a couple of friends, my kids and grandkids.

### **Impact**

64. I never got on with my mother for years after coming out of Merkland Children's Home because I had such a horrible time in there and blamed my mother for putting me in there.
65. I didn't get on with my sisters for a while after I got out of care because I was annoyed that I had been put in care and they hadn't, but that didn't last long and I ended up having a really good relationship with them.

66. I had nightmares for a while after coming out of the home, but that stopped after I met my husband because I felt safe with him.
67. After leaving the home, I became too scared to go out by myself and would always need somebody with me. I am still like that and won't go anywhere alone because I don't trust people. I don't have a lot of friends for that reason.
68. When I was pregnant with my first child, I made a decision to never put them in care and to be a good parent. I think I have been a good parent to my three kids. I took them out places and did homework with them, and never hit them. I did worry about them a lot and would panic over little things like if they were home late. I don't know if that is because of what I experienced.
69. I felt quite suicidal last month and thought about committing suicide for a while. I realise now how selfish that was of me and wouldn't do it again.
70. People say that you learn to live with the experience of abuse but you don't. It is there, in your head, all the time. I try not to let it interfere with my life too much but my mind goes there whenever I hear anybody talk about child abuse or see it mentioned on the telly. It annoys me when people who haven't experienced it, talk about it.

### **Treatment and support**

71. I spoke to a grief counsellor after my husband died because I was going to his grave every day.
72. My doctor got involved when I felt suicidal and was thinking about doing it. That was about a month ago. I spoke to my sister about it who told me to call my doctor, which I did. My doctor was really good with me and got 'Distress Brief Intervention' involved straight away who helped me for a week.
73. I still speak to a mental health nurse once a week.

**Reporting of Abuse**

- 74. I spoke to the police at Annan Police Station in 2011 or 2012 about my abuse in Merkland Children’s Home. The female officer I saw was really nice. Peter Harley had already been convicted of abuse by that time and had got fifteen years in jail.
- 75. The police woman I spoke to was really nice and told me that other kids had come forward too. She told me that the little boy who used to dirty the bed in Merkland was still in Dumfries. She knew exactly who I was talking about.

**Records**

- 76. I wanted to get my records just so I could know for sure what dates I was in care. I have never bothered trying to get them but I might.

**Lessons to be Learned**

- 77. I hope that kids aren’t put into care for stupid little things, like I was. There are other ways to deal with kids if they are just misbehaving at school.
- 78. When kids do talk about abuse, they should be believed and it should be investigated.

**Other information**

- 79. 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... PKA .....

Dated... 7/7/2022 - .....