

## **Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

PKN

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is PKN. My date of birth is 1970. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### **Life before going to Fornethy House, Alyth**

2. I was born in Belvedere Hospital and raised in the Ruchazie area in Glasgow. I lived there with my mum, dad and my older brother and younger sister. My dad did not come into my life until I was nearly five weeks old. He worked as a long-distance lorry driver and my mother was a machinist.
3. Initially we stayed in the Maryhill area and when I was six we moved to Ruchazie. I went to Ruchazie Primary, Miss Flora Brown was the head teacher there. After being at my last visit at Fornethy I moved onto Smithycroft High School. I always had problems with my reading and writing when I was at school.
4. My father drank a lot when he was home from his work. There was no social work or other agency involvement. I was told that I was going to be sent to Fornethy House during the of 1977. Later in life I think this was to give my mum a break, and it was cheaper than a holiday. I thought it was going to be like going to a camp.

### **Fornethy House, Alyth**

5. When I went to Fornethy it was for six weeks during the [REDACTED] break. I know this because when I was home I was only there for a week before school started up again.
6. Before I went there mum had been given a list of items of clothing that I needed for my stay at Fornethy. I think the list may have been attached to the application form, which had been supplied by my school. I also had to attend the city centre of Glasgow to go for a medical examination at Glen Street.
7. I went to Fornethy three or four times, I think between 1977 and before I went to High School, and my sister [REDACTED] was only there once, during my third visit there. My brother did not go as it was for girls only. The incidents I will describe later in this statement happened to me but I may have mixed up which time I was at the home.

### **Routine at Fornethy House, Alyth**

8. My mother took me to the bus station, at Glen Street, along with my little brown case. When I went on the bus there were other girls also going to Fornethy. I can't remember if we went straight there or whether we picked other girls up on the way. I remember it was right out in the country, near to Blairgowrie, and we went through a forest. When we came out the other side of the woods there was a big house with grounds all around it. When we arrived there, some girls were ready to go back on the bus, to go home. I think it was near lunch time when we arrived there.
9. As soon as we all arrived we were told to change out of our clothes and put on their blue pinafore dress. They also gave us wellies and a pair of shoes to wear, the shoes were usually too small. We were not allowed to wear our own shoes. We were also made to have another medical and then sent for a bath. After having the bath, we were sent to the recreation/TV Room. When we were all gathered, we were then separated into groups, for our dormitories.

10. The dormitories all had different names Reeky Lynn, Prozen, Ogil and Esk. I was allocated to the large dormitory, Reeky Lynn, which was situated next door to the library. Twice I was in that dorm and the other times I was allocated to Prozen. We were not allowed in each other's dorms.
11. In the dormitory there was a wardrobe at the side of the bed where we hung the pinafore dress and the rest of their clothes. Each of the shelves in the wardrobe were marked for the items of clothing, i.e. Pants, tops, skirts etc. That was where we stored our own clothes. At the end of each bed there was a chair for sitting on. I think there were eight single beds in my dormitory.
12. I think there were no more than fifty girls there and they were all aged between 7 or 8 and up to about ten years old. I can remember some of the names of the staff at Fornethy. Miss Fletcher was the head of the school, and every time she got angry her eyes would bulge out and she was shaking so much you could see her hair moving as well. Miss PWH, who was always smoking and kept her cigarettes and matches in her pocket. and Miss Robertson, both teachers. There were two auxiliaries, one of which was called Gladys. Gladys was a really nice woman who was always singing.

#### *Mornings and bedtime*

13. In the mornings, the staff would pull the blankets off our beds to waken us in the morning. I think the reason for this was to stop us falling asleep again. This would be somewhere between 6:00 am and 6:30 am. We then got dressed and headed for our breakfast. After eating breakfast, it was back up to get our teeth brushed. It was then into some sort of work in the school.
14. When we went to bed at 8:00 pm we might be given fifteen minutes to read a book, before it was lights out. Even when they turned the main lights out there was a blue light still lit. I presume this was an emergency light, but I am not sure. The shutters on the windows were all closed which made the room even darker.

### *Mealtimes/Food*

15. When it came to mealtimes we all sat around big round tables. There were four or five of us at each table and there would be somewhere around 8 tables in the dining room. I can remember the first few times I was there one of the kitchen staff was called Mary and when she handed out half cups of tea to anyone in the evening, then that was the girls who had a problem with bed wetting.
16. Before heading down for our meals, we all lined up beside our respective dormitories. When we went into the dining room for our meals we were all made to stand behind our chairs while grace was said. The teachers sat at their own separate table near the top of the room.
17. The food at Fornethy was not great. For breakfast we had some porridge which was really lumpy. There were also some mornings when we got cereal. We were each given half of a morning roll, along with a little butter and marmalade. I can remember the eggs, because you could smell them in your dorm, before you headed down. When they were placed on the table, they were green in the middle.
18. I can also remember at lunch times we were given a bowl of soup which was a horrible green colour. Another common meal we were given was mince, potatoes, and peas. If you were not eating the food fast enough the staff would mash all this food together and make you eat it like that. The staff did not eat the same food as us, it always seemed much nicer. To this date I can't eat pea soup or boiled eggs.
19. At the end of the day, we might be given a glass of milk and a couple of digestive biscuits.
20. The last time I was there it was Irene Simpson and her friend [REDACTED] that looked after the kitchen. They were so friendly Irene even gave me her home address as I left the home, with the intention that I could visit her. She was due to marry her boyfriend Gordon. When I was home after the last occasion there, she phoned me at my house to check how I was.

### *Washing/bathing*

21. There were showers available at Fornethy and there was one possibly two baths. I can remember when it came to having a bath we all had to queue up naked. There was very little water in the bath and as soon as we were washed we were out again, and the next girl climbed in. The bath was only used during the day.
22. I only had a bath once or twice a week, but the showers were each night. When we had a shower it was the same routine, and we were only allowed three minutes in the shower before being told to get out and get dried. We also had to wear a shower cap as there was no dryer for your hair. The showers were communal with no cubicles.

### *Clothing/uniform*

23. We had to wear the clothing supplied by Fornethy and wear that all the time. The only exception to that was if we were going to church, then we would be allowed to wear our own clothes.

### *Leisure time*

24. Sometimes if we had no classwork to do or in the evenings we would often be taken out for long walks. This would be every other day that this happened. We would be made to walk around the surrounding farms or up into the hills. There was no village nearby for us to walk to. It did not matter if it was raining or not we still went on the walks.
25. In the home we had a recreation room where we could play records. At the weekend, the staff would get a projector out and we would be shown a movie. Each evening before going to bed around 8:00 pm we would be in the recreation room.
26. There was the tuck shop available where at the weekend we would be able to buy sweets, juice, and toothpaste, if you had run out of that.

### *School*

27. There was no schoolwork like what we were doing at our primary school. Most of our time when we were being shown anything was based around different types of craft work.
28. After school if we were not going out for a walk then we would just play in the playground. There was a play shop in the playground but that was only big enough for a couple of people and not enough for all the girls. If the weather got bad there would be fights among the girls to get into the play shop. When the girls would have the fights to get in there the staff would be standing at the windows watching what was ongoing.

### *Healthcare*

29. I don't remember having to see anyone for any medical issues. I never saw a doctor or dentist while I was there. I do remember one girl who was suffering from severe pain from an abscess in a tooth. It was so bad they had to contact the girl's parents to come and pick her up.

### *Trips*

30. I can remember going to see Snow White when it first come out in the cinema. I am not sure if that was when I was at Fornethy or back home.

### *Religious instruction*

31. Sometimes we were allowed to go to the church, but the numbers were limited. The names of the children going to the church were put on a list the night before. I don't know how they chose which girls were going. I think I may have gone to the church only once in all the times I was at Fornethy.

32. In the home we would have to say prayers at the side of our bed before we went to sleep and grace before our meals. The staff would supervise to make sure you were repeating the words correctly.

*Visits/Inspections*

33. During any of the times I was at Fornethy there were no visits from the social work or any other organisation, to check on our welfare while we stayed there.

*Family contact*

34. Although we did not get any visits from our families we were allowed to write letters once a week. The problem was you could not write what you wanted. The staff wrote on the blackboard what was to be said in your letters and you had to copy this. If not done properly then your letter would be ripped up.
35. There was a telephone in the home, but we were not allowed to use that to phone home. Mum was told that there were no visits allowed by the family to come to Fornethy. After only a few days at Fornethy I was feeling really home sick and spoke to one of the teachers asking to go home. They told me that I would not be allowed home until the end of the six weeks.
36. Mum would write to us, and she would include some postal orders for us. The postal orders were made out to the school. The value was entered in a ledger which Miss Fletcher kept. She then marked each time we were given any money. That money was supposed to give us funds for the tuck shop. We were never given all that was sent to us and each time I went home any leftover funds were kept by the staff. We were only given the actual letters if the staff were happy with what our parents had written. If there was anything wrong they kept the letters.

### *Running away*

37. I don't remember any girls running away from Fornethy as there was nowhere to run to. Miss Robertson had told us not to run away. She told us one girl tried but she never came back. I am not sure if that just meant she was not allowed to come back or if something happened while she was away.

### *Bed Wetting*

38. I did not suffer from bed wetting during the night. The problem was we were not allowed to go to the toilet during the night. There was one night I was awake but was needing to go. I knew I could not go to the bathroom and ended up dirtying myself. Miss Robertson found I had done this and she dragged me out of the room and took me down to have a shower. While I was cleaning myself I had to clean my sheet. I was then made to put that wet sheet back on the bed and sleep on it.
39. The bed wetters did talk about what the staff would do when they wet the bed. I did not see this, but the girls would say that they were slapped on the head for wetting the bed.

### **Abuse at Fornethy House, Alyth**

40. When we were having a shower and Miss Robertson was supervising, she would make comments and comparing the body size and shape of the different girls. I was always self-conscious beforehand but that made things worse for me. She made me feel so humiliated with her comments.
41. If you did not eat the food, Miss Robertson, or one of the other teachers would give you a slap across the head. That happened to me, and I saw it happening to some of the other girls. You were made to eat every bit on the plate, even if you did not like the food. If you did not eat it they would force it down your throat.

42. There were other times when we were out for a walk and if Miss Robertson caught any of us girls chatting she would bang our heads together. It only happened the once to me as I soon learned not to talk when we were out. I still have a lump on my head.
43. At night we were not allowed to talk as we lay in our beds. If Miss Fletcher caught any of us talking she would make us go down to the library where we would be made to stand with no clothes on. If you cried when you were getting so cold she would just get more angry. After what seemed ages she would let us get dressed and go back to bed.
44. There was a night when I was crying in my bed because I was home sick. Miss PWH heard me and made me get out of my bed and took me down to the library. When I was in the library she used a slipper to hit me on the back of my bare legs. After a while in that room she then sent me back to bed.
45. When my sister was there with me I can remember she was crying one night. I told her to keep quiet, because if any of the staff heard her she would be taken to the library and given the same treatment. Unfortunately, Miss Fletcher, heard us and she us both go down to the library where she made us stand naked. I was facing one wall and my sister was made to stand facing another wall.

#### **Reporting of abuse at Fornethy House, Alyth**

46. Every year I was being told I was going to Fornethy I tried to tell mum that I did not want to go as they were hitting me. She would tell me that this couldn't be the case as it was not what I was saying in the letters she was being sent. It was not until around 2020 that I was able to tell mum the full extent of what happened while I was at Fornethy. It had been on the news when I told her. She was devastated when she found out the truth.
47. At the home there was no one to report any of the abuse to. Most of the staff were involved and there were no independent visitors to talk to.

### **Leaving Fornethy House, Alyth**

48. It was only when I was moving into the High School that I was then too old to go back to Fornethy.
49. The only good memory I have of my time at Fornethy was that the RAF often flew the planes over the area around there.

### **Life after being at Fornethy House, Alyth**

50. When I went to the High School some of the girls found out I had been at Fornethy, and they would verbally abuse me because of this. I don't know why they had anything against the home.
51. There was no involvement with the social work after I attended at the High School. I was given a little help by the school to help with my reading and writing.
52. In 2017 I saw something on the Internet asking about people's experiences at Fornethy. I was asked to fill in a form on line, about my time there. I can't remember who it was for. I completed the form and put in many negative comments about my experiences. I am not sure if my form was ever published.
53. When I left the school at sixteen, I worked a few jobs under a YTS scheme. I went on to work as a machinist for around 16 years. I always wanted to join the army as there is a family history of people serving time there, but with all the abuse I suffered, my poor education stopped me doing that.
54. I decided to move to stay in Belfast. I got married when I was 21 and have my two kids, [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. That relationship did not last as there was a lot of domestic

violence whenever Rangers lost a match. I got divorced and moved back with my kids to Scotland.

### **Impact**

55. Even today when I hear songs being played from the 1960's and 1970's I get flashbacks of the bad memories of my time at Fornethy. I also wake up during the night with nightmares and see blue lights similar to the emergency lights there.
56. From my time at Fornethy I grew to have a total fear of teachers. This continued into my adult life and could not even go to my daughter's parent's night at her school. If there were any other meetings at her school, I would always have to take someone with me as I was so scared. I am self-conscious of myself because the staff were constantly making comparisons about the size and shape of each of the girls.
57. I have never seen a counsellor to talk over the abuse that I suffered when I was at Fornethy. I did recently tell my GP some of the memories I had from Fornethy, and he has prescribed medication for high anxiety.

### **Reporting of Abuse**

58. There was [REDACTED] with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], I can't remember her surname, over a year ago. [REDACTED] was talking about the abuse that had happened at Fornethy. [REDACTED] listed a telephone number for people to call. After calling the number I spoke with the police and have since given two separate statements to them. The police were showing me a photo album of possible members of staff from my time at Fornethy. I am not sure where that came from as we were always told no cameras were allowed. I am not sure what is happening with the reports that I made.

**Records**

- 59. I have never been back to visit Fornethy. I would have liked to have applied for my records of my time there, but I have been told there are no records available.

**Lessons to be learned**

- 60. There should have been more checks carried out by social workers or independent visitors to check that the home was being run properly and that the girls there were being looked after. Kids should have been able to telephone their parents. I also think to build up some good memories the kids should have been allowed to take photographs.

**Other information**

- 61. I believe if there were independent people to talk to that would have helped me and many other girls get through our time in Fornethy. I would like to be able to speak with the teachers from Fornethy and ask them why they treated us the way they did. I would like to see anyone who is still alive be reported to the courts.
- 62. 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. PKN .....

Dated..... 2-11-2023 .....