

My name was [LUA] - D.O.B. [REDACTED] 1968

I was four years old when my siblings and I were first placed in care. It was a children's home in Glasgow I think, it was really scary, the kids ran wild and did whatever they wanted, we weren't there very long before we were placed in Nazareth House, it was 1972. I remember it being a scary experience as I don't recall ever having been around nuns before and they were scary in their long black flowing robes and the house was huge and I guess to a young child it was very overwhelming and strange. I'd been living with my granny and grandad, elder sister [LTO] and elder brother [LVB] and my dad in Glasgow. My dad chose to put us in care, maybe he thought it was for the best or maybe he did it to spite my granny, I don't know. I don't really have much memory of my dad other than that he was a scary man, he would drink and when he drunk he was violent, although never to us children. On the flip side of this I loved my dad and just wanted him to love me and in his own way I think he did, but life was hard for him. He and other members of the family would drink and argue and fight and my granny was often in hospital with injuries.

My mum and dad had been living in London when I was very young, my dad when drunk was an extremely violent man. When I was I guess a toddler my mum ran away to Wales and set up a new place for us and her without him. She later met another partner and had a baby by him. A year or so later my dad turned up and wanted her and the kids back including the new baby. She was terrified of my dad and I guess realised that while she had us he would always go after her. The next day she said she was going to the shops with the baby and never returned. I was maybe close to 3 years old by then. It was a scary time, I didn't know this new man, my dad, who was now looking after us, he took me to Glasgow where I stayed with his parents, my granny and grandad. He stayed in Wales with my siblings and tried to make a fresh start and get a job. Things didn't work out and sometime after he arrived in Glasgow with my siblings and we all lived with granny and grandad.

Fast forward a short while and we ended up at Nazareth House Aberdeen. I have spent many years getting over the stigma of being brought up in a children's home. The feelings of worthlessness and never being the same as the other kids at school or the feelings of not belonging and feeling unwanted. In many ways Nazzie was a safe place. You got to stay in bed all night and never got dragged out a window and had to spend hours up the steps in the close waiting for everything to calm down before you could go back inside. In other ways Nazzie was a hard place, there were lots of older kids and they could be rough and bully you, particularly if like me you were tiny for your age and what they called, one of the good girls who never got into trouble. I think I learnt from a very young age to stay under the radar and try not to be noticed. I was placed with my siblings in the care of Sister [LJI]. There was a young sister there, I think she was in training, Sister Brenda, who I remember being kind and reading me stories at bedtime. She made it less scary at the time. I shared a room with my sister and two older girls [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They weren't very nice and they didn't seem to be there that long, I remember something happened am not sure what but I do recall Sister [LJI] coming out of a room and closing the door behind her, her veil was all pulled out of place and she was busy organising it and getting herself back to normal. At the time it was thought that one of the [REDACTED] girls had done this to her. Sister [LJI] had her favourites and they seemed to get whatever they wanted but I don't remember feeling upset about this, it was just the way it was. It was scary at night, I'm still terrified of the dark because of the group. It was so big and we were in the bottom bedroom and if you wanted to go to the toilet at night it was a really, really long walk down the hall, you then had to open a door half way down and then down the rest of the hall to the toilets at the bottom on the right, it was really dark and I remember being really scared. I remember there being sometimes a kid at the bottom of the hall who'd be standing there in trouble for wetting the bed, I guess they felt the way to stop him wetting the bed was to humiliate him and make him stand there like that, down near the toilets instead of being in bed. I have always felt sorry for what we called the wee the beds as they seemed to have it rough. I don't ever recall wetting the bed but I recall being so scared and not wanting to get out of bed in the dark to go to the toilet and by the time I got out I'd almost wet myself on the way trying to get there. I don't know how long we were there before my dad came and took us back to Glasgow. It must have been a little while as I think I'd started school. Back in Glasgow life was still the same and after a short time my sister decided that we would run away to go back to the nuns as she felt we were safer in the convent. So at the age of 5 and she was 11 we left granny's house in [REDACTED] to head to the social work department. I don't remember

where it was but it was a long walk and it was a big red sandstone building. It was closed when we got there and we spent the night in what I think was a service station toilet, hiding in a little cubby hole at the end of the toilets. Was it terrifying yes, I just wanted to go home, maybe because I wasn't old enough to understand all that was happening, but I just wanted my granny and grandad who I loved very much. In the morning we walked around and around the social services building until someone came, I think it was the cleaner, I remember being given a little cardboard doll where you pushed out cardboard clothes and could put them on the little doll. It's funny what you remember.

So back to Nazzie we went, I had to have my teeth seen to as while I'd been in Glasgow I'd had an accident and smashed my front teeth... I don't have an actual memory of how the accident happened but the story goes that I was pushed head first down a slide but I'm not sure exactly where or how this happened. This was a terrible experience as it was decided that a front tooth would have to come out and then I had to have what I know today as a denture plate. The dentist would come into the home, he had his own room set up in our group. To this day, I fear anyone in white coats and am terrified of doctors, dentists, hospitals and have panic attacks at being in a hospital. I don't know why no one talked to you at that time and explained what was happening. I had a metal thing with all the pink gunk shoved in my mouth and I felt my mouth was going to split apart. This happened many times over the years as my plate often broke and the front tooth would either fall off or I'd swallow it while eating food. As a result I have a massive overbite to my jaw because of this and have for years lived with the effects of bad dentistry. I think this is a thing that most kids in care can relate to... I don't remember there ever being any advice about brushing your teeth and dental care. Years later when I finally got to meet my birth mother, I met my younger sister and brother and remember my sister telling me how she'd had problems with her teeth and how mum had fought to get her proper dental treatment. She has perfect teeth and to this day I still feel if only we'd been brought up by mum, I'd have great teeth. Sounds silly but to me it's significant. From the very first sign of a tooth coming through my children's teeth were brushed and cared for. I remember back then we would queue up outside the dentist door waiting for our time to go and then you'd wake up in the playroom where you'd been dumped to come round after the gas, this was just terrifying and you always seemed to wake up with a big filling or a tooth missing.

There were good times. We would go on holiday to Tombae during the summer holidays and this was when my birthday was. I remember a big long table, lots of kids and feeling special as it was my birthday, I'm sure there was cake. I have beautiful memories of Tombae and today it is one of my favourite places in the world. We would be given cartons of juice and then we would be off out with the staff and walk over the hills and countryside it was so beautiful and free. I have memories of Sister [LJI] having ripped up old sheets and wrapping our hair so we'd wake up in the morning with ringlets, it made you feel special to have this treat and as I was usually the scruffiest kid on the block it made you feel pretty. We also got to use our pocket money in the shop at Tomintoul and buy a little souvenir for our family. The nuns also had some chalets at the beach in Aberdeen and during the summer we would spend time down there. At Christmas there would be children's parties and we would all stand in queue for a present. My first really special Christmas was when we met the [redacted] who later became Auntie [redacted] and Uncle [redacted] from Peterhead. They are the people who I have the fondest of memories from my childhood. When I was with them I felt relaxed, loved and cared for.

As my brother hadn't returned to Nazzie with us, I often worried about him and missed him. He did come back to Nazzie eventually, but it seemed to be after some considerable time, he'd got in trouble in Glasgow and I think he'd spent some time in Borstal. When he came back we had a different nun, Sister [LMQ]. She was very different from Sister [LJI] and I don't really remember liking her very much. She didn't seem to like us and would often talk about her other girls (from wherever she was previously) and how they were so nice and she often threatened that she would send them all our hair bobbles and slides as they would appreciate them more than us. That we wouldn't need them and she had a big thing about cutting girls hair. One of the girls [redacted] couldn't find her hairbrush or hadn't brushed her hair enough one day and the nun just grabbed her really rough by the hair and pulled it into a pony tail and then just cut it off in one go and sent her to school like that. She was one of the proddy (protestant) children, they were always sort of less in the home as they weren't Catholics. I'd never use that phrase nowadays as I really have no interest in whether people have a faith

or what they believe in, but definitely in those days there was always a difference between the prods and the catholics I think it's just how it was, I personally couldn't care less who or what you believe in, I think it's about being a decent person and that if you are decent to those around you then if there is anyone up there when you pass well at least you've been decent in life and no one can be blamed for that. Personally I gave up on religion a long time ago. But poor [REDACTED] she was just little and it was so awful and her hair was just hacked it was a mess. Then soon after I remember my sister talking to Sister LMQ and telling her not to cut my hair or she'd tell my granny and I still to this day am not quite sure how she managed it, whether my sister just couldn't believe it was happening but Sister LMQ basically told her if she didn't cut my hair she'd cut hers and Sister LMQ did just that. Poor LTO she had a job of working down at the parlour with the parlour nun. When the nun saw her she was shocked and asked LTO what had happened. LTO refused to go to school until it was sorted, she's the only girl I remember being taken to a hairdressers. There is a photo of some of us kids out the front of the house with one of the mother superiors. She'd had her leg broken I think in a car accident. LTO hair must have been cut not long before this as it is very short and up until then we always had very long hair. I remember mostly being very scared of Sister LMQ and trying to keep out of her way. Although I do remember that she had a thing about making gypsy skirts with little frilly hems and I remember that she made me one of those. It was nice and I really liked it, she also loved Little House on the Prairie and we would all sit and watch this in the TV room. I got through most of life at Nazzie by staying under the radar, trying very hard to never get into trouble and spent most of my time reading anything that I could get my hands on. I lived my life through those books, travelling up the Faraway tree to magical places and as I got older going on adventures with the Secret Seven and the Famous Five. Sister LMQ is the nun that I find difficult to think about as I feel she caused the disconnection between my brother and LTO and myself. Some of that is to do with the fact that when my brother returned to Aberdeen she wouldn't let him be in our group. This decision affected my relationship with my brother and though I have tried many times over the years to get a relationship with him it has never been maintained and I blame this decision for the start of a very tough road for my brother.

After Sister LMQ left I have memories of being moved to different part of the house, it was along past the laundry and it was downstairs and a modern part of the house. It was where Sister LDX had used to be with her group of kids. (They were like the elite group in the home, they got the best of everything, they went to a different place for holidays and they even went to different schools from the rest of us. I don't know what happened to Sister LDX but she just left. They even had a dog called Jason. They were the lucky kids.) Our group had been I guess the middle of the pecking order and there was also Sister LRB I think who'd been upstairs from our group and then there was Sister [REDACTED] group which was on the street to the side of Nazzie, this was where my brother was put, with the big boys. The nun in this new group I recall was Sister LJS She was lovely, so friendly and very different from Sister LMQ I recall she had a sister who was her twin and also a nun although not in Aberdeen. I thought things were going to be good in this new group with this new and it was much more relaxed. I remember fun times like decorating the tree at Christmas and the tree being so big that they had to chop some off the top to make it fit. However as things were they weren't always good. It was I think the scariest experience I had at Nazzie. The problem was that when Sister LJS went to bed and shut her door, the big boys ruled the group. I remember one night I was in the same room as my sister and her friend [REDACTED] and the big boys were roaming the corridor outside and knocking on the door trying to get into the girls room. They ended up waking up one of the younger kids so it was screaming and I recall my sister and [REDACTED] shoving me out of the door to go and see to the little kid so that it would be ok and telling me that I'd be ok, that I was too little and the big boys wouldn't hurt me. There is lots of stuff from that time that I have blocked and that I have never been able to look at despite counselling sessions. I think that's the minds way of dealing with things and I have no way of telling you what occurred but I do remember being in a room with older boys and I remember being scared and my mind closes and I cannot go past that point. As an adult I feel like it wasn't ok that we were put in the situation of being at the mercy of these older boys, I don't even think some of them were meant to be in the group as they seemed to only be there on a night. I recall that some boys as they got to be older would live in little rooms to the side of the house opposite the kitchens, I think near where the mortuary was as I remember as my brother got older he had one of these little flat/room places. Another night I remember that a man came and sat rocking on the wall outside our bedroom window, he just rocked

back and forth and back and forth. It was scary but the gates were usually left open and often I guess homeless people would come in and sleep in the variety sunshine coach van. For a time I think there must have been some issue as I recall that the police were doing drive rounds to check on things. When I was nine my sister left to go to Glasgow for the weekend and never came back to Aberdeen. I wish someone had sat me down and explained to me all that was happening but they didn't. As far as I'd been aware we'd been meant to be moving to Peterhead to live with Auntie [REDACTED] and Uncle [REDACTED], Uncle [REDACTED] is dead now but Auntie [REDACTED] remains part of my extended family (I think that they would have been foster carers in those days but we just knew them as a friendly couple who came and took us for days out, weekends and holidays). I think that was one of the hardest things, that decisions happened around you which had an enormous impact on your life yet you were never given any idea of what, why or when it just happened that one day you were going to be doing this and the next day those people who had come to mean so much to you weren't there anymore. It was hard. When I was 12 years old I was moved to Nazareth House Cardonald, I don't really remember much about this time other than that I was very unhappy and I think this was when I first really showed signs of going in on myself as I call it. By then my sister and brother had both left Nazareth and it was thought that it'd be better if I was back in Glasgow and nearer to family. I can see the reasoning for this but it didn't work out and I requested to go back to Nazzie in Aberdeen as that was the only place I'd ever really considered to be home. I only stayed in Cardonald about six months and then I was back in Nazzie Aberdeen. I remember having more dental appointments in Cardonald but the dentist was in the city and I remember that they didn't do gas. I remember the shock of getting a needle in my mouth and then nearly falling down the stairs when I left as I was so panicky about being at the dentists, especially on my own.

There were fewer kids when I returned to Aberdeen and it was Sister [REDACTED] LHA who was in charge of the group, she was a lovely kind lady and I remember times of walking alongside the river in Tombae with her, listening to her saying her rosary and prayers. She was a good lady and I enjoyed the time of being back in Aberdeen. There were hardly any children left at all by then, I didn't realise that the convent was closing its doors to kids and that we were all due to be moved out. Of all my experience of childhood it was this decision to foster me out that was the one to have the biggest impact on my life. People often ask do I blame the nuns and apart from Sister [REDACTED] LMQ I don't, I mean yeah I think that we could have been better cared for emotionally. I don't think anyone ever really thought back then about the damage and impact that trauma and adversity can have on children in those days. The label of delinquent and the stigma of being a kid in care was forever with you, I can still here the echo from the past of "who'd love you, even your own mother left you". It was cruel and no one ever made it better but then that was the life we lived, things happened and you just moved with it and tried to understand the best that your brain could at the time. For instance one day we were all at the swimming baths in Bonnacord Street Aberdeen, we'd often go there with the staff. On this day there were two young boys who were new to the home, I'm not sure what they were really doing there, they didn't live in the home but they were there with us for that day. One of the little boys died, he drowned, I think he was sick as he jumped in and choked on it. I had nightmares for years afterwards about that little boy. No one ever asked us if we were impacted by that experience, no one ever hugged us and told us it was ok to feel sad and scared. I will never forget the sight of that little boy lying on the side of the pool and the colour of his skin, it was so awful. I'd seen dead people before, in the convent, when one of the old people died they'd sometimes have an open coffin in the church and that was scary enough, but they were old people not a young kid who'd been alive and breathing a few minutes before. No one was able to talk about it, it was a horrible time with us all being warned not to say anything if we answered the phone in case it was a reporter or someone wanting to ask us questions. We didn't really understand what was wrong, just that something bad had happened and that the little boy was dead and that his family were very unhappy and somehow it was our fault because he had been with us. That memory stirs up other feelings of unease.. another time that I should remember but my memory has blanked out. There was a lady there that day, she worked at Nazzie but I don't think with the children, I think either the old people or the kitchen, I don't know but definitely not with us kids. But she had a son and there were times I went and stayed with them and these times made me uneasy and unsettled, I have no memory why, other than that I didn't like the lady. She would tell me that she knew my mum and that she had messages from my mum and that she'd worked with my mum. It was odd and there was something not right about the situation.

Soon after I stopped staying over with them and I don't recall her working at Nazzie anymore after that. I've talked to my sister about it many times over the years trying to work out who this lady was and just can't come up with any idea but am sure her son's name was [REDACTED]. Years later when I did reconnect with my mum I found out that the lady had been telling lies as my mum had never known that we were in care and did not know anything about where we had been or have any idea who this lady had been. It's like my head goes cloudy when I try and think more about this time and like as if I'm trying to grasp at fog.

Things were changing at Nazzie and there were not so many kids left and they would eventually stop having children and instead only have old people. So the decision was made that I was to be fostered. Apparently my photograph was put in the local paper asking for people to foster me. I don't know if this is true but it's what my first foster parents told me. I have always hoped that it wasn't true as I can't believe that people would really treat you like this, advertising you like as if you were a stray dog. Soon after, a man and woman came to Aberdeen Nazzie and met me and then I went to stay a few weekends before going and living with them permanently. They lived a good bus ride from Nazzie and it was scary coming home from them on the weekend on my own and walking from the bus to the house in the dark. I guess I was about 13 by then and so it was felt I'd be ok. I was terrified of the dark and to this day I still sleep with a light on. After a short while there I was at this family's home permanently, they had a daughter younger than me, an older son who apparently the nuns weren't told about cos he worked away a lot on the oil rigs and also they had an older daughter who was just getting married but we couldn't say anything about her wedding as the couple had told the nuns the daughter and her partner were already married, as they were living together. Right from the start they wanted me to call them ma and da, which I didn't want to do as they weren't but I did as I didn't feel I had a choice and I was used to doing what I was told. I was there for about 18 months I guess. They belittled and humiliated me at any chance they could get. I was a sensitive, quiet young girl who was struggling to deal and make sense of what the world had thrown at me. It was a really tough time for me, I didn't understand why I was placed with people who drank alcohol and a man who when drunk smacked his wife. I remember the day she had a black eye and they said she'd fallen and hit herself on the kerb walking home. I'd seen plenty examples of that with my granny. This lady who was meant to be my new mum, was the first adult to ever hit me, the shock at being slapped across the face by this lady is still imprinted on my memory today. They were cruel people who enjoyed humiliating me and systematically set out to alienate and distance me from my family and from anyone that had ever meant anything to me. They laughed at my shocking attempts to peel a potato, do you realise that I had never been in the situation to see a potato peeled, our food came on a trolley from the kitchen. They told me that the nuns had never loved or cared for me they were doing their duty and that there had been so many children they'd not been able to realise or show me how to use a knife and fork properly so I should eat on my own until I learned how to do it properly, I never did manage this according to them so spent a lot of time on my own apart from this family. It was hard to tell anyone how unhappy I was and what exactly was going on, if my family phoned the couple always made sure one of them was in the room to hear what I was saying. I've talked to my family since then and they have told me that they knew something was wrong but did not know what to do as I always said things were fine when they asked me. Fortunately though things were a little different from the time in Nazzie as now there were Aberdeen social workers who came and talked to me and asked me how I was, I'd been made a ward of court and I now had an Aberdeen social worker. Whereas in Nazzie we'd have been under the care of Glasgow social workers who didn't come to the home. I think looking back that people knew things weren't right, I'd tried to talk to my friend's parents who lived next door and they in turn talked to my foster parents but it just resulted in me not being able to see or speak to my friend. Even my sister [REDACTED] who'd come to visit once, was terrified of this lady. One day when they'd gone out for a family day and again I was left at home, with her words ringing in my ears of how I had ruined their lives that they'd lost all their friends because they'd fostered a catholic girl and that she'd not be happy until I left her house for good, how much she hated me. I still think I was to blame for some of it, she just wanted a reaction, she wanted someone like her own daughter who would rant back at her. But the harder she pushed the more and more withdrawn I became. She was convinced I was nuts and needed to see a psychiatrist. I know I needed help, things had been tough for me as a child but placing me in a situation where I was living with alcohol, physical and emotional abuse as well as a good measure of scapegoating was never going to fix me. Anyway

somewhere inside of me I found the courage to phone social services and tell them that I needed out off there and the social worker listened and actually I think was glad that I'd finally talked. She arranged a two week emergency placement and got me out of there. That was a significant move for me. The people I was placed with are my parents today and grandparents to my children. I don't know what would have happened if I had not met them. It took a long time but they were the turning point in my life and over time I began to trust people, I even was able to hug people and begin to show my emotions. Emotions that I had shut down as a child as to have emotions in the convent brought attention and for me survival was to be under the radar and not doing anything to make yourself be seen.

I still struggle with feelings of inadequacy at times but work hard to not let this show to the outside world. I feel I'm able to use my experience of my childhood in a way that helps others as I work within the child protection industry and my role is to recruit, train and support foster carers. It's hard to do my job at times as it can be emotionally draining as you have to really give of yourself in this role and at times I struggle with whether the system really works or continues to abuse the children who are in the system in ways that we are only recently coming to understand particularly the damage that emotional abuse can have on children and the impacts of not maintaining the sibling relationship can be catastrophic as has been proven in my case as I have never been able to heal the relationship with my brother.

I count myself as one of the lucky ones, I've grown up, had children and now have grand-children and have a life where I have always worked and supported myself independently. I currently live in Australia with my two sons and my two grand-children. Are there things that I struggle with from the past. The constant buzz in my head from having learnt at such a young age to keep everything inside of me and not talk out. I apologise for everything whether it's something I have done or not. It's taken so long to try and get over the shame and embarrassment of having been brought up in care and now it's like its all here again as it's in the media. I can't say I never saw people being humiliated as I did. The emotional abuse is the toughest thing to bear as its something that you can't see yet leaves scars that never heal, the fear of the dentist and anyone in white coats is something I've never managed to conquer. My blood pressure goes through the roof on any occasion that I'm in a medical establishment and I have to work hard to reassure myself and calm myself down. My teeth are a mess and I wish I could have been brought up by my mum and have a proper relationship with my birth family as I feel like I've never quite fully belonged anywhere. I think in life we are always searching for the place where we belong. I thought I found it in marriage but after 20 years that broke down and I still struggle to find where I fit in the world and what my purpose in life was for. It's like you never really truly belong anywhere.

Did I grow up blaming the nuns for all the wrong in my life, no. Do I wish that it's acknowledged that things weren't the best and that we young kids were not treated the best, yes I do. But I blame the social services also. Until I was transferred to Aberdeen Social Work Department I do not recall any social worker coming and talking to me about what was happening in my life or asking my opinion or for me to be involved in any decisions that where about my life. No one has ever explained to me why they never got in touch with my mum and told her we were in care. I was 38 before I was ever able to have a relationship with my mum, she died the week I turned 40. Do I have regrets that no one ever thought to get in touch with her .. yes I do. She had no idea we'd been placed in care, she thought that we'd been brought up by dad and she was sure that he'd never hurt us like he did her. I felt like we were abandoned at the convent and that no one cared. I did not feel worthy of care or that I mattered. I blame the social services for placing me with a foster carer couple who were cruel and humiliated me on a daily basis. They resented the fact that I was catholic and they refused to let me eat with them and very rarely was I ever allowed to even sit in their lounge with them. I was physically and emotionally abused. When I finally left there care I was not able to take hardly any of my belongings, not even the one thing that meant the world to me.. It was a big toy cuddly dog that was worth nothing to anyone apart from me. My dad on his only visit ever to Nazzie Aberdeen had sewn the tongue back on it. It was the only thing I ever remember my dad doing for me and it was priceless to me. Am I bitter about the care that I received as a child and young person. No I refuse to let my childhood define who I am today, it was something that happened to me but it is not who I am. The system was wrong, it hurt and damaged children but we got through and I am proud of who I am and how far I have come and in all honesty when I look back to Nazzie and the nuns I mostly

remember the positives, the feeling of safety and being cared for and happy times of kids grabbing all the cushions of the sofa and placing them along the hall in high piles and running and rolling over these cushions, I remember climbing trees in Tombae and wandering for many hours through the highlands. Whenever I hear the song "Oh Flower of Scotland" I remember going in the minibus with the kitchen nun to Marks and Spencers to pick up the food that was all beginning to go out of date and we always had treats on that day and we would sign along with her in the van on the way there and home. There was good alongside the hard times.

It's been a challenge writing this and sadly for me the rawness of opening doors to things that I don't like to talk or think about has caused me some emotional upheaval and I've had to seek support from my doctor to help with anxiety. It's not easy to think about these times, it's not easy to grow up never knowing where you belong or where you fit in. To have people look at your children as babies and say they look like their dad but no one can say that for you as who knows what you looked like as a baby. There are no photos of that time. When I was 38 I saw my first ever baby photo, it was quite overwhelming. We have learned much over the years about child protection and how to care for children better. An understanding of the impacts of trauma on children and the impacts of abuse and neglect and the importance of building connection and positive self-esteem with children. Life in care had a significant impact on who I am but it's also about the individual and their inner strength and resilience.

Signed:

LTO

Dated: 23rd April 2018

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