

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MRZ
[REDACTED]

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is MRZ [REDACTED] My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1937. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. My earliest memory of my childhood is living in the Falkirk area of Scotland. I stayed with my mother, father and three older sisters. [REDACTED] was the oldest, then [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
3. When I was around four years old I was out with my mother when she was knocked down and killed by a bus. I was in hospital afterwards. I remember this very clearly.
4. My father took care of us after the accident. [REDACTED] my sister would also help when dad was at his work. My dad died when I was seven years old. He had went for an operation for a perforated bowel and he died during the operation.
5. After my dad died our Uncle [REDACTED] moved in and looked after us. I don't even know if he was our real uncle. I can't remember knowing him before he came to our house.
6. Before I went into care I had attended [REDACTED] Primary School, which is between Stirling and Falkirk.
7. It was about a year after my father died that myself and [REDACTED] were taken away. One of my aunts took in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

8. I was put into a children's home in Bathgate. However I was very young and I don't know the name of this place.

Life in care - Scotland

Unknown orphanage, Bathgate

General

9. The orphanage at Bathgate was a big building, like a mansion. It was a mixed home for boys and girls. I was moved to a different school when I went to the orphanage. I was sad about this because I had like the school in [REDACTED]

Weedingshall Children's Home, Polmont

General

10. At some point I was moved to Weedingshall Children's Home in Polmont. I don't know when this was. I was still with my sister, [REDACTED]. She went there as well. The home was run by a matron and nurses. There were dormitories in the orphanage and I recall there were five or six of us in each dormitory. I had no contact with my other sisters [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

Mealtimes

11. The home was very regimental. You had to line up for your meals. The food was okay. You would get a whack on the back if you didn't sit up straight at mealtimes. It would be the matron or one of the nurses that would do this.

Visits/review of care

12. No one from the social work ever visited us.
13. When I was eleven years old I was moved to Levenhall Home for Boys in Musselburgh. My sister [REDACTED] didn't come with me. I would find out later that my Auntie [REDACTED] wanted to take care of [REDACTED] and me. She wasn't allowed to because she already had too many children.

Levenhall Home for Boys, Musselburgh*General*

14. I think that the Presbyterian Church ran the orphanage at Levenhall Home for Boys. It was all boys there. There were four or five staff. I can't remember who was in charge. The meals were okay at Levenhall. I remember there being plenty of porridge. I don't remember there being any issues with bathing and we were given regular baths.

Work

15. Every morning one of the staff would ask two or three of us to go to the beach. This was to collect coal for the home. I think that the coal was washed up on the beach after falling from passing ships.

Discipline

16. If you didn't behave then you would be clipped around the ear by the staff.

Review of care/visits

17. I had no contact with social work or my family. I never had any visits at Levenhall.

Migration

Selection/information

18. I was asked by one of the staff at Levenhall if I wanted to go to Australia. There was no presentation or anything like that. I thought that it was to go on holiday. It never occurred to me that I wouldn't be coming back.
19. There were two of us from the home that went at the same time. I think that the other boy's surname might have been [REDACTED]. I didn't have a medical examination prior to leaving. I don't remember any visits to the doctor or dentist at any of the homes I was in before leaving to go to Australia.
20. I was given some clothes in a small suitcase. I can't remember who it was that gave me this.

Leaving Scotland

21. We left from Glasgow on the train. It was the 5th November 1950. There were other kids on the train from different homes. One of the boys was called [REDACTED]. He was with his mother. The other boys I remember being with me were [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] or similar. I don't know how [REDACTED] surname was spelt. All the boys who were with me on the ship went to Dhurringile. There were also some other adults with us on the journey but I don't know their names or what their roles were.

Transportation

22. We travelled by train from Glasgow to Liverpool. I think it was the [REDACTED] 1950 that the ship departed from Liverpool. The ship was called the NV Cheshire. I had never been on a ship before.
23. There were a couple of blokes in charge of us on the ship. I shared a cabin with four or five other boys. There were bunks in the room.

24. When we sailed through the Bay of Biscay I remember I was very sea sick. I was well looked after when I was sick and after a couple of days I was fine.
25. There were activities on the ship and I remember that there were games for us to play with.
26. When I was on the ship I recall that I was given an inoculation for small pox.
27. The ship stopped at Aden but we didn't get off here. We were able to get off the ship when it arrived at Colombo in Ceylon as it was known then. It was the worst experience of my life. There were children there who had leprosy and parts of their arms were missing. It was very frightening as a child to see these shocking things.
28. The first port we arrived at in Australia was Fremantle in Western Australia. We were taken off the ship and went on a bus to have a tour of the local area. I remember it being extremely hot. No one said if this was our final destination. The bus took us back to the ship and we then sailed on to Melbourne in Victoria. Melbourne was to be our final destination.
29. We arrived in Melbourne on [REDACTED] It extremely hot there as well. There was 29 of us put onto a bus with no air conditioning. We were taken on a journey of a 120 miles.
30. We were told that we were going to a place called Dhurringile but that was all I knew.

Life in care – Australia

Dhurringile Rural Training Farm, Tatura, Victoria, Australia

General

31. Dhurringile Training Farm had been a prisoner of war camp during the Second World War. It was now owned by the Presbyterian Church. The farm was in the middle of nowhere and it was all boys at the farm.
32. We were the first children to arrive there. There was a superintendent in charge of the facility. There were also four or five staff. The staff would do things like the cooking. The only names of staff that I remember were Mr Anstie and his wife and another woman called Hannah. All the staff who worked at Dhurringile were Australian.
33. The boys who I remember arriving at the same time as me were [REDACTED] two brothers with the surname [REDACTED], a boy with the surname [REDACTED] and the other boys who I said were on the ship with me.

Dormitories

34. I stayed in a dormitory. It was made clear to us that we had to keep this clean. We had to make our own beds and we also had to polish the floors.
35. It was very difficult to sleep at night because of the terrible heat. We also had to put up with every type of insect.
36. The food was cooked by the staff and it was okay. We had to wash the dishes after our meals.

Schooling

37. When I arrived at Dhurringile it was the summer in Australia. The school I would be going to was closed for the holidays. This meant that I was missing out on a lot of the schoolwork I had been doing at Levenhall.
38. The school was about 42 miles away from the farm. It took about an hour on the bus to get there. The bus was old and there was no air conditioning. It was boiling hot on the bus. It was a completely different world.

39. I got on alright at school. There was never any homework to do though. Most of the work was done at the school. There was no encouragement from the staff to do any homework at the farm.

Religious instruction

40. As the institution was run by the Presbyterian Church we had to go to church every Sunday. We were taken as a group on the back of a truck to the church. It was about six miles away from the farm.

Work

41. All the boys at the home worked on the farm. There was a set daily routine. Some of the boys would do something one week then other boys would do this the next week. Our chores included such things as feeding the pigs and milking the cows.
42. There was a bit of freedom for the boys but most of the time it was like living in a prison.
43. I think that when I was around fifteen or sixteen I got my first proper job which was not on the farm. It was at a local knitting mill. The skills I had learned at Dhurringile had helped me to get the job. Once I started working and being paid I had to start paying for my board on the farm.

Other Information

44. There seemed to be a steady stream of boys coming and going at the farm. After I arrived at Dhurringile there were a few more boys arrived and there were still boys arriving when I left the farm.
45. Once I decided to leave Dhurringile I was completely on my own. There was no preparation for life beyond, you just left. I had not been taught any life skills for managing money or paying bills.

Life after Dhurringile

Leaving

46. When I left Dhurringile I started working on a number of different farms as a labourer. It was mainly dairy farms. You would be provided with accommodation on these farms when you were working there but it was basic. Some had cold baths. On another farm I had to sleep on the veranda. It was very hard work. Sometimes I would work for fourteen hours each day often in extreme heat. (FOR ABOUT 2 POUND A WEEK)
47. I was on my own a lot of the time. This was when I started to wish someone would come and take me home to Scotland.
48. I continued to work on the farms until I was about 25.

Campaigning/awareness raising/other organisations

49. When I was older my sister, [REDACTED] managed to get in touch with me. I don't remember how old I was at that time but it was after the last farm I worked on. So I would have been older than 25. [REDACTED] had tracked me down through the Salvation Army. I think she had found out that I was in Australia.
50. I also received a letter from a lawyer. I was told that when my father had died he had left me £17 in his will. A cheque was eventually sent to me for this amount.
51. I wrote to my sister [REDACTED] a few times after this but I wasn't much of a letter writer. Two of my sisters are dead now. It is only [REDACTED] who is still alive and she still lives in Scotland.

Child Migrant Trust

52. I first found out about the Child Migrant Trust when I saw an advert. This was either on television or in a newspaper. I realised then I could apply for money from them to let me visit Scotland. I think that the funding came from either the British or Australian government.

Records and family tracing

53. I have never managed to get hold of my records. I never really tried to get these.
54. In the late 1980's I went back to Scotland to see my sister, [REDACTED]. It was my niece who arranged most of it. She met us at the airport. It was very emotional seeing [REDACTED] and her daughter. I also visited my other sisters but [REDACTED] didn't recognise me. The house was horrible. There were smokers in the house and I remember that it was full of smoke.
55. When I saw my sister [REDACTED] she told me that she had the opinion that I was in some way responsible for my mother's death. She also blamed my mother for it happening when it did. [REDACTED] said our mother shouldn't have been in the place where she was knocked down in the accident. This relationship and my sister's opinions were all very traumatic for me.
56. I wouldn't go back to Scotland to live. There is nothing there for me now.

Other matters for relating to migration

57. I still have my original birth certificate so I must have sailed with it. I think it must have been handed to me when I got off the ship. I don't remember who handed it to me though.
58. After I was married and had children I started travelling a bit. I didn't have any problems getting an Australian passport. I still feel that I am half Australian and half Scottish.

Impact

- 59. In one way I didn't like coming to Australia. Life on the farms was very hard. I had to travel a lot to go to work. In another way Australia has been good for me up to now.
- 60. None of the homes I was in showed me any love or care in the way my mum would have. When you were moving from home to home no one ever explained to me what was happening. It was like cattle being moved from one place to another.
- 61. I don't think that the authorities had the right to send me to Australia. I thought I was going there on holiday. I had no idea that I was going to stay.
- 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..... MRZ [REDACTED]

Dated..... 4 OF FEBRUARY 2019