

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

LZX
[REDACTED]

Support person present: No

1. My name is ^{LZX} [REDACTED]. My date of birth is the [REDACTED] 1971 and I am 48 years old. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I want to tell you about the period between 1979 and 1981 when I was a boarding pupil at St Columba's College in Largs, Scotland.

Life before going into care

3. I was born in Paisley but initially brought up in Johnstone near Glasgow. My parents' names were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I was an only child and had no brothers and sisters. My mother passed away in [REDACTED] 2010 but my father is still alive although I have none or very little contact with him.
4. When I was about four years old my father had an affair and my parents split up. My parents were both strong Catholics and this did not go down well with the Catholic Church. Although my mother had done nothing wrong it was her that was shunned by the Catholic Church who did not recognise divorce.
5. When I was about eight years of age my mother moved from Johnstone in Glasgow to Blackpool in England. She had managed to save up some money and bought a [REDACTED] in Blackpool which she was going to run.

6. My mother made the decision that the best thing for me would be to attend a Catholic boarding school while she established the [REDACTED]. I think that my grandmother may also have been an influence over what happened to me as she was a very strong catholic and exerted control over my mother.
7. I was attending St Margaret's Catholic Primary School in Johnstone and although my mother had been asked to leave the Catholic Church she still brought me up as a Roman Catholic. Again I think that this was influenced by my grandmother who was my mother's mother. I suspect that my grandmother may have suggested that I attend St Columba's College to ensure I continued to be brought up in the Catholic faith. Meanwhile my mother who was a very loving person created a new life for me and her in Blackpool.
8. It was decided against my will that I would go as a boarder to St Columba's College in Largs while my mother established her [REDACTED] in Blackpool. I didn't want to be separated from my mother. In later life I always wanted to ask my mother why I had been sent there but I never did as when I left St Columba's I locked my memories away. My mother and I were very close and I don't think that she would have enjoyed being separated from me.

St Columba's College, Largs, Scotland 1978 – 1981

9. Before I started attending the school I recall going with my mother and grandmother on at least two visits to St Columba's College to see what it was like. I recall that we were met by Brother Arthur who was the Headmaster. There was no entrance exam or anything like that.
10. Prior to going to St Columba's, I recall that I had to go to a school outfitters shop in Glasgow where I had to buy my school uniform along with all the things that I needed for school.

11. The school consisted of two buildings at the end of a long driveway. It was an old grand style building. To the left of the main building as you looked at the front door was another building that housed the classrooms and it was where most of the monks stayed. Brother ^{AKU} [REDACTED], who was the [REDACTED], had a room in the main building beside the boys' dormitories. There were huge grounds that ran up to an embankment. At the top of the embankment was a golf course. There was a pond in the grounds.
12. When you entered the main building there was a formidable staircase that took you up to the main dormitories. Half way up the stairs was a statue of the Virgin Mary. On the ground floor there was a study room and the television room. The kitchens and dining room were at the back of the ground floor. There was also a toilet.
13. On the first and second floors were the dormitories. There was a shower room on the first floor and a bathroom and toilets on the second floor. I think that there were four dormitories with six or seven beds in each. I moved dormitories on two or three occasions. Brother ^{AKU} [REDACTED] had a room to sleep in on the first floor and then moved to a room on the second floor at the same time as I moved there. I think that in total and including day pupils there were between fifteen and twenty boys at St Columba's.

Routine at St Columba's College, Largs 1978 – 1981

First day

14. I was dropped off at the school and I think I must have been the first pupil to arrive for the new term. I was in the dormitory on my own and I remember crying myself to sleep. I also remember writing a letter to my uncle [REDACTED] and aunty [REDACTED]. I was not at all happy about being there. No one came to comfort me or speak to me, I was just left on my own.

15. I was taken there by my mother, my aunt [REDACTED] and my uncle [REDACTED] and I think that I was met by the [REDACTED] Brother ^{AKU}[REDACTED]. I knew him as Brother ^{AKU}[REDACTED] and didn't know his surname until later life. I think that the other children arrived the next day so I am assuming that it must have been the start of term in [REDACTED].
16. There were a lot of rules and regulations which you had to learn. The regime at the school was very strict. None of the rules were explained to you as you had to learn them as you went along. I can't recall how I was addressed but I do remember being called Master ^{LZX}[REDACTED]. I addressed the Brothers as "Brother". I don't recall any initiation ceremonies or anything like that.

Staff

17. Brother Arthur was the Headmaster and he was a lovely man who at the time I suspect would be in his 60's. He was very gentle. Brother ^{AKU}[REDACTED] was the [REDACTED] and looked after the day to day care of the pupils. He was a Brother but never wore the robes of the Marist Order. He had black hair and a black beard. He was ^{SNR}[REDACTED] of the dormitories. There were two other Brothers who were teachers but I can't remember their names.
18. There were lay staff who did the cooking and the cleaning along with the laundry although I cannot recall any of their names. I don't think that they stayed on the premises.

Pupils at St Columba's

19. The pupils I remember being there with were the son of the [REDACTED] people from Largs who was called [REDACTED]. He was a day pupil I think. He was the [REDACTED] I knew at school, I don't think I knew Aldo Maroni. ^{MGR}[REDACTED], he had a brother called ^{MGQ}[REDACTED] who was two years older, there was a boy called [REDACTED] whose parents ran a pub in [REDACTED], [REDACTED] was another boy and there was a boy called [REDACTED] but I can't recall their surnames. There was a day pupil who lived locally in Largs called ^{MOV}[REDACTED] and he immigrated to [REDACTED] while I was still at the school.

20. I do remember that ^{MGR} [REDACTED] was Brother ^{AKU} [REDACTED] blue eyed boy and could do no wrong. He was his favourite boy. I was very good friends with ^{MGR} [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] when I was at St Columba's.

Mornings and bedtime

21. Brother ^{AKU} [REDACTED] would get you up in the morning. You went and had a wash in the shower room on the middle floor. You then went down to the dining room for breakfast. After breakfast you had to wash up the dirty plates before you went to school. All the boys took a turn washing up after meals. Then you went off to the classrooms which were in the other building.
22. I think that we shared a wardrobe with another boy that would be sleeping next to you and that is where you kept your clothes and any personal effects. I think that Brother ^{AKU} [REDACTED] would do inspections of the dormitories to make sure they were kept tidy.
23. After school you would have tea and supper. I think that you had to do homework and you could play in the games room where there was a snooker table. There was also a PE room. You were allowed to watch television for a while before you went to bed. There were massive grounds to play in. I don't think that I had many personal possessions and I don't remember playing with toys.
24. I think that you would be in bed about eight o'clock. Brother ^{AKU} [REDACTED] would come into the dormitories to check that you were in bed and that there was no nonsense. He would put the lights out.
25. Most of the boys who had families living locally would go home at the weekends. My mother would come as often as she could to take me out at the weekend and we would stay with family in Johnstone. I would also go and stay with my grandparents. Some of the boys had to stay at the school full time as their parents were working abroad. I occasionally stayed over at the weekend in St Columba's.

Chores

26. You had to make your own bed and keep your dormitory tidy. There was a rota and all the boys had to take turns at washing the dishes after meals. There was staff to do all the other household chores.

Mealtimes / Food

27. The food was horrendous. It was things like porridge with salt. There were women who did the cooking but the boys washed up. There were long tables and you could sit anywhere. Brother ^{AKU} had his meals with us but the rest of the staff had their own dining room in the other building where they took their meals. There was no choice with the food you either ate it or not. There was no punishment for not eating the food. I remember a delicacy that the boys always ate after school as a snack which was salad cream sandwiches.

Washing / bathing

28. There was a large communal shower on the first floor that did not provide any privacy when you took a shower. I can't recall when we had showers but I assume they were compulsory. I think that Brother ^{AKU} would supervise the showering. I don't recall seeing any other Brothers there. I recall that Brother ^{AKU} would make us stand naked on a set of scales while he weighed us.

Clothing / uniform

29. You had to wear school uniform when you went to school. You had a shirt and tie, you wore shorts or long trousers in winter, black shoes and a school blazer which I think was navy blue. You had to provide your own uniform. You changed into your own clothes at night time after school.

School

30. School was terrible when Brother ^{AKU} taught you. He wanted to intimidate you and exert power over you by showing you who was in charge. I was a young boy and he was an adult. There were about eight or nine pupils per class. There were four classrooms and a music room. You went to allocated classrooms to be taught the different subjects.
31. There was a very old music teacher who was a Brother but I can't remember his name. He was a very nice gentle man. If you said you were ill you also had to stay in bed all day and I often used this as a tactic to avoid a class with Brother ^{AKU}

Religious education.

32. You went to church every Sunday and there were prayers said every morning. The church was the local Catholic Church in Largs and was run by the local priest whose name I can't recall. You had to go to confession every week. I think that all the preparation for my Confirmation was done by the local priest in Largs although I don't think I was confirmed until I was in Blackpool and back staying with my mother.

Pocket money

33. Brother ^{AKU} would give you pocket money every Saturday morning and he would then take you for a walk into Largs where you could spend the money on the local supermarket. I think that the money was provided by your parents and he kept it in a small study room he used and dished it out to you from there. That room was off the television room on the ground floor.

Trips / Holidays

34. We would offer a support to a local children's home which dealt with disabilities. We would go there and entertain these children by playing music for them. We would go to the fair that was on the seafront at Largs although the visit was always supervised by Brother ^{AKU} [REDACTED] I don't recall any other trips.

Birthdays and Christmas

35. I would be at home for Christmas during the school holidays and I don't remember celebrating my birthday.

Visits / Inspections.

36. My mother would visit as often as she could and she would take me out on a Saturday and bring me back on Sunday evening. I also got visits from my relatives who stayed in Johnstone. I do recall that I wrote a lot of letters to my mother. Brother ^{AKU} [REDACTED] would arrange to send them but I don't know if they were read before they were posted. I don't recall any official inspections of the services offered at St Columba's.

Healthcare

37. I don't recall any health professionals visiting the school. If anything happened to you as far as being hurt was concerned it would be dealt with in house by one of the Brothers. I think that the only injuries I ever had was bruising from being punished. I don't recall a dentist.

Running away

38. I never ran away from school and I don't think that I ever contemplated doing it.

Bed Wetting

39. I occasionally wet the bed but the cleaning ladies would cover up for us. I had never had this problem before and the ladies would strip and wash the bed sheets and not tell Brother ^{AKU} because they knew he would not take it well and that I would have been punished. I don't think that Brother ^{AKU} ever found out. I never saw him dealing with any boys who were bed wetters.

Punishment

40. Brother ^{AKU} was the man who handed out the punishment. There was a lot of hitting with the belt. It happened a lot. Every lunchtime Brother ^{AKU} would tell you who had been bad that day and that they would have to attend his room after tea for punishment. He would tell the boys what order they were to come to his room. He would also belt you on the hand or on the backside during the day.
41. When you went to Brother ^{AKU} you usually went on your own although there were other boys outside waiting their turn. In his room you were told to strip naked and given three choices of punishment. You could bend over his knee and he would smack you with his hand. You could get the belt on the hand or you could touch yourself up in front of him. You would be encouraged to play with your genitals while Brother ^{AKU} sat there giving instructions. I think that I had three punishments at one time or another. This happened to me a lot and I spent a lot of time being very scared about what could happen. It also happened to the other boys but we didn't talk about it.
42. When you were punished you would have to go back to your bed and stay there for the rest of the day. If Brother ^{AKU} punished you in class by belting your hand or backside you would be sent to bed but I would prefer being in bed than being taught by him in his classroom. It was very hard for an eight or nine year old to stay in bed all day.

Abuse at St Columba's College, Largs

43. Brother ^{AKU} had this thing about weighing us when we took a shower. He would get us all stripped naked and he would sit and watch as we all stood on a set of scales and were weighed. I have no idea why he did this but I felt that we were being weighed all the time.
44. On one occasion I was in a maths class being taught by Brother ^{AKU}. I got one of the multiplication tables wrong and he threw a wooden blackboard duster at me which hit me on my chest and arm then he knocked me off my seat by punching me on the arm. He grabbed hold of me and I started to cry. He was shouting at me and I ran out of the classroom as I was petrified.
45. Brother ^{AKU} chased me out of the classroom where we ran into Brother Arthur. Brother Arthur grabbed hold of me and gave Brother ^{AKU} a look of disgust that I will never forget although it is hard to describe. Brother ^{AKU} went back into the classroom and Brother Arthur took me to another room where he sat me down and talked to me till I calmed down. Brother Arthur was a lovely man.
46. As a result of what Brother ^{AKU} did to me on this occasion I became terrified of being in a classroom with him. I may have been bruised as a result of the assault on me by Brother ^{AKU} but I didn't need medical attention. I think that I told Brother Arthur about what happened but I don't know what he did about it.
47. On one occasion a group of us went to the shows at Largs. Brother ^{AKU} was with us. I managed to win a small teddy bear. I was so excited because I had never won anything before. Brother ^{AKU} took it from me saying that it belonged to the school. I was mortified and he knew that. He kept that teddy bear in his bedroom as a sort of mascot and it didn't make me feel any better seeing it there most days.

48. Brother ^{AKU} made the whole school watch the film the Deer Hunter which is about the Vietnam War and is probably not suitable for boys as young as we were. It was a long film and Brother ^{AKU} showed it in two parts. The first part was shown on a weekend evening. I watched the first part and then as a punishment he wouldn't let me watch the second part. He told ^{AKU} and me that he wanted us to come to his room that evening. I remember begging him to let me watch the second part as I thought that the alternative to watching the film was to be subjected to some sort of punishment in his room and that turned out to be the case.
49. Brother ^{AKU} would always announce during dinner in the evening who was to come to his room after the meal and be punished for being bad that day. I recall the first time I had to go when another boy called ^{AKU} and I were summoned to Brother ^{AKU} bedroom. It think it was the only time I went with another boy but I can't be sure. He was sat in a chair and told us to strip naked. He then gave us three options. We could bend over his knee and be smacked, be belted on the hand or we could cuddle each other and play with each other's genitals. I am not sure how old I was but it was not long after I started at St Columba's I was maybe about nine. It felt that the incident went on for an eternity and I was there for a long time but I don't think that was the case in reality.
50. ^{AKU} and I decided that cuddling and caressing with each other and playing with each other's genitals was the best option as it didn't involve corporal punishment. I didn't understand what we were doing because we were eight or nine years old and too young to understand. We were not sure what he wanted us to do so he told us that we were to take one of the other choices. I just wanted out of the room as I didn't like any of the choices. I remember that it was cold and I was crying. I was traumatised and wanted to get back to the other boys where I knew I would be safe. I think that he belted us and we managed to get out of the room.
51. I was now in the dormitory on the second floor and Brother ^{AKU} had moved his own bedroom to the second floor in a room next to my dormitory. One night Brother

^{AKU} came into the dormitory and told me to come to his bedroom. I was half asleep so I am not sure how long into the evening it was. I went into his room and he was sitting at a computer playing an Atari game. He told me to take my pyjamas off and get into his bed. He was sitting at his desk with his clothes on playing his computer game and giving me instructions about what he wanted me to do. He was watching me in the reflection of the computer screen. I must have been about nine years old.

52. Brother ^{AKU} told me to start playing with my genitals and get my penis erect. I was not aroused and he leant over me. I didn't understand what he wanted me to do. He was telling me what to do to get aroused. I am sure that he put his hands on my privates. He asked me who do you think of when you are playing with yourself. He said is it your mother or your gran which I thought was very strange. He was getting very angry with me because I wasn't getting aroused. I was too scared to do anything. He told me on the first occasion I was on my own when this happened to put my pyjamas back on and go back to bed.
53. This happened on four or five other occasions when he was a lot calmer than the first time. He tried to help me get aroused but it just didn't happen. He said that he would show me what to do by pulling back my foreskin. He was always dressed and I didn't notice whether he was aroused or not. I can't recall seeing Brother ^{AKU} naked. I think that I sometimes fell asleep in his bed and woke up terrified with him lying next to me. I would get up and sneak back to my own bed. I was not aware of this happening to other boys at the school and it was never discussed amongst the boys.
54. There were no other members of staff to turn to for help. Brother Arthur was too nice and I don't know if he knew what was going on. I was too frightened to tell anyone. I couldn't tell my mother because I felt that I was being punished and would be in trouble for telling my mother. I am absolutely sure that if I had told my mother she would have had me out of the school immediately.
55. Brother ^{AKU} kept saying that I was being punished because of what I had done, He said that the devil was watching me and that he would come for me. I can recall lying

in my bed when Brother ^{AKU} came into the dormitory and you just hoped that it wasn't you but one of the other boys that was selected to go to his bedroom. I never saw an incident involving any of the other boys. Other things may have happened to me but I can't recall them and I may have shut them out of my memory.

Leaving St Columba's College, Largs - 1981

56. I left St Columba's when I was about ten years old. My mother had established her business and I was able to go and live with her in Blackpool so there was no need for me to attend boarding school. I left in 1981. I left with a few months to go of the school term.
57. I attended a local school in Blackpool for a couple of months and at first I didn't like it because I had lost contact with my friends. I remember sitting with ^{MGR} and who were my friends in the dormitory. I just wanted to get away from the school but I didn't want to leave them behind. I remember that ^{MGR} gave me a hologram picture of Jesus as a going away gift.
58. I think that my friends and Brother Arthur saw me off. I was picked up by my mother in the car. I think we went back to my gran's in Johnstone and then on to Blackpool from there. I went to St Mary's School in Blackpool so the Catholic theme continued. I went on to High School and had no issues at school.

Life after St Columba's College

59. I continued a normal life and had a very loving mother who got married when I was fifteen. I got on very well with my new step-father. I completed my education and went on to a drama college in London. It was a bit like being in the army in that they wanted to reduce you to nothing and then build you up. As part of this process they wanted me to talk about my about my childhood and because of this I dropped out after a year.

60. I went back home and did some odd jobs before joining an airline where I have worked for the last twenty odd years. I enjoy travelling and was steadily promoted to Service Manager.
61. I got married late in life and my husband and I have since adopted a three year old boy. I have everything that I need and life is very good at this time.

Impact

62. I decided early on that I would not allow what had happened to me in St Columba's affect my life. I managed to put it to the back of my mind and left it there. I didn't think about it anymore until one day very recently I was looking through Facebook and saw all the comments from former pupils of St Columba's. I thought it was just me that had been abused and I didn't realise that there were others who had suffered abuse. I think that the main author on Facebook was ^{MGQ} [REDACTED].
63. There was a picture of ^{AKU} [REDACTED] on the internet and it hit me like a brick. It was less than eight weeks ago and before I contacted the Inquiry. I experienced all possible emotions. I made the decision to tell my story, I wanted to be part of the story and the court case that had already happened. I wanted some pay back on ^{AKU} [REDACTED]. I was shocked to learn that he was only eight or nine years older than me.
64. I googled what to do and it took me to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. I contacted the Inquiry by phone and made my application. I confirmed that I wanted to make a report to the Police and within a few hours of ending the call the police contacted me.
65. I always had problems with trust and forming relationships. I have difficulties telling my story but with the support of my husband, I find that I no longer blame myself for what happened and that I don't have to lock it up any more. I know that I can get closure on what happened at St Columba's College. I think that talking to the Inquiry will help me achieve that closure.

66. I don't have a strict loyalty to the Catholic Church but I don't think that I am adversely affected after my experiences at St Columba's. I do not regularly attend church. I have been considering having my son baptized in the Catholic faith. I know that my mother always retained her faith despite being thrown out of the Catholic Church for getting divorced through no fault of her own. I always wanted to make my mother proud and still attend church on her birthday and the anniversary of her passing.
67. I am not aware that my mental health has been affected by my time at St Columba's. On the advice of the police I have attended a doctor since I made the first time disclosure to them. The doctor has also been very supportive and if necessary will take whatever action is required although at this time I feel fine.

Reporting of Abuse

68. In [REDACTED] 2019 I was contacted by the police as a result of applying to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. I was contacted by a detective called Kenny Carson who works in Glasgow. As it happens my work was taking me to Glasgow later in the week and I arranged to meet him at Glasgow Airport and the police recorded my statement. It was the first time that I told anyone what happened to me at St Columba's. They have been very supportive to me ever since and have kept me informed of all developments.

Records

69. I asked the police about the records but I think that they thought that the records may have gone. They said that there may have been a fire and some records were destroyed. I just really want to know the dates that I was there. I have not applied for my records at this time.
70. I have made contact with ^{MGR} [REDACTED] through the internet over the past few years [REDACTED] ^{AKU} [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. I have not asked

[REDACTED] I am not a member of an old boy's network from St Columba's.

Lessons to be learned

71. I would like to see the recommendation that one man should not be able to dominate the control of a house full of boys. There was no supervision of him and he could do what he wanted. There should not be a person on their own put into that position. I know that there are background checks done now but what was done when [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was in charge of the boys and who allowed him to have that level of control without any real supervision?

Other information

72. I have a very good photograph of all the pupils I was with at St Columba's which I supplied to the police. I have since got it back and can make it available to the Inquiry if it is required.

73. I have been back for a visit to St Columba's during my fortieth birthday year. It was included in a planned tour of Scotland and my partner at the time came with me. I did not tell him what went on at St Columba's but I was for some reason desperate to go back. There is a kind of pull to the Largs area that I can't describe. The school has gone now and it is mostly demolished.

74. 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..... [REDACTED]

Dated..... 24. 09. 2019