

Name: Mary Reilly Speirs

DOB: 02/09/1958

Name of Care Home/s: Beechwood, Tollcross Rd for 8 weeks aged approximately 15

Mafarragh House Denniston - 4 months aged approximately 15

Children's Home In Glasgow (behind Western Rd)- possibly Cleveden House or Nazareth House - 4 months, turned 16 whilst there

Reason for going into care: Underage sex- Children's Panels

Age in care: Approximately 15 years of age

Personal Statement

Beechwood Children's Home

Beechwood was the best of a bad situation, but even there I experienced difficulties. I had never smoked or drank before entering, and when I first arrived, staff asked if I wanted two cigarettes a day or two sweets. I chose the sweets, and because of that I was bullied by the other girls, who felt I should have taken the cigarettes for them.

One girl, Katie Mac, terrified me. I remember her melting the wires on a brush and dragging it across another girl's face. I was so afraid of her that I went to bed clutching knitting needles for protection.

Added by Mary on 05/12/25 - **The staff knew what she was like but did nothing to stop her. The staff were nice but didn't care for you properly. They didn't get involved if they saw trouble going on. I would hide in the showers to get away from everyone as I was that scared. I would spend a long time in there for safety and only leave if someone came in and said they needed to use the showers. A girl I knew from school, Jackie Boyle, sort of stuck up for me, and she was no angel herself, but she told Katie Mac not to put out a cigarette on me once saying that questions would be asked if she did as I didn't smoke.**

If children wanted to run away, staff would take us out for a walk and allow us to go. At night, I remember lying in bed while all the girls cried. Years later, when I was working in a pub in Glasgow, Katie Mac walked in. Even as an adult, I was so petrified that I ran through the back to hide.

Maffragh House ???

Maffragh House was dreadful. The girls were constantly hungry, and the cereal was contaminated with rat droppings, so no one ate it. I sometimes had to go home for meals because I was starving. The staff never spoke kindly; they only shouted. A woman there, known as Major, **as she was from the Salvation Army, called us all scum and dregs of the earth. She was in her 50's and** took money from social workers that was meant for buying me shoes and clothes. One day I received £8 for shoes, but when I asked my social worker, he told me he had given Major £20. I reported her for stealing, which turned out to be a terrible mistake. She made my life miserable, telling me I was worthless and forcing me to be in before everyone else. I was sent to bed without dinner and constantly begged my social worker to move me, though it took time.

Added by Mary on 05/12/25 - **I ended up stealing to buy alcohol to get the courage to go back there and face it all. We'd steal to buy food too sometimes as we were so hungry.**

I was beaten by a girl named Catherine Quinn, and when a staff member came in, Major dismissed it as "squabbles" and sent me to my room. The girls often gathered to pick one person to bully. If we refused to join in, we became the next target. Showers were communal, leaving us with no privacy. One night, a girl poured water over my bed, and I had to sleep on the floor because I was too afraid

to tell staff. Day after day, I was bullied, and the home changed me completely. There was no sexual abuse from staff, but some girls behaved inappropriately. I was pushed against walls and kissed, and one girl tried to get into my bed. I ran away and hid in the shower until she left. Living in Maffragh House made me submissive, allowing people to walk all over me.

Christian House, Glasgow

I was later moved to a Christian house in Glasgow.

Added by Mary on 04/12/25 - **It was behind Western Road. I can't recall the name at the moment, but it was a lovely place inside. I turned 16 whilst I was there.**

There, I was forced to attend church and join the choir. If I refused, staff would not speak to me or show any kindness. I was never a believer in religion, but I was forced to follow the Christian faith.

My time in care changed me into someone I was not. When I left, I was no longer the girl who had entered. I turned to alcohol and eventually needed rehab. I know that if I had not been in care, I would not have gone down that path. To this day, I still suffer from flashbacks and nightmares about my time in care.