

Witness Statement of: Jenny Quang
No. of statement: 1
Date of statement: 18/05/2018

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

PHASE ONE WITNESS STATEMENT OF JENNY QUANG

I, JENNY QUANG will say as follows:

1. This statement is my account of events that took place on Tuesday 13 June into the early hours of Wednesday 14 June 2017 which I make for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.

Background

2. I am 23 years old. I lived on the 10th floor of Grenfell Tower in Flat 76 with my mum Hoang Quang and sister Lucy Ho. My mum was a council tenant and moved to Grenfell Tower in 1990 before I was born. My dad Van Ho moved out many years ago, but would occasionally stay at our flat.
3. I study medicine at the [REDACTED] and have two years remaining of my course. Currently, I am studying MRes Tissue Engineering for Regenerative Medicine. Apart from my time away at university, I had lived in Grenfell Tower all my life before the fire.
4. I attended the day nursery that was located inside the tower. I then attended Oxford Gardens Primary School. For secondary school I went to St Paul's Girls' School, a private school in Hammersmith. I was given a full scholarship and I remained there until the end of sixth form.
5. In 2013 I took a gap year while I was applying to universities to study medicine. During this time I worked part-time at St Paul's Girls' School and taught rowing.

Jenny Quang

6. Growing up, my sister and I were friends with Mariem Elgwahry. She lived in Flat 196 on the 22nd floor of Grenfell Tower. I went to the same primary school as her and she used to come to our flat when we were children.
7. My health before the fire was fine. Since the fire, I have been intending to get counselling and to also see my GP; however my current schedule with university has made this difficult.
8. On the night of the fire I was in [REDACTED] I moved [REDACTED] for university in September 2014 but frequently visited my family home in London. My mum and dad were in Flat 76 on the night of the fire.

Flat 76

9. Flat 76 is on the 10th floor with five other flats. I only know a few of the other residents of this floor. Flat 73 was occupied by a [REDACTED] family, two women in their 50's or 60's and a man called Adam in his 20's. A woman in her 50's and her son in his 30's lived in Flat 75. I do not know either of their names.
10. Our flat was on the north east corner of the tower. The kitchen windows look out towards the walk blocks and the bedroom windows onto the academy and the leisure centre. The flat is owned by Kensington and Chelsea Council and had two bedrooms, a living room, a bathroom and a toilet.
11. We had two smoke alarms; one in the kitchen and the hallway. These were put in by the council in, I think, 2013, replacing the old ones. I do not remember them checking the alarms after they were put in. We did regular checks to make sure that they were working. Other than the fire alarms, I do not recall there being any other fire safety measures.
12. The front door to our flat was red. It was relatively new, having been replaced in the last five years. Once opened, it would not shut by itself and would stay open until someone closed it. I do not think it had a self-closing mechanism and I do not think it was a fire door. There are fire doors fitted in the student accommodation that I have stayed in and in comparison with those, this door was not very good.

13. The sinks in the bathroom were always leaking and, sometimes, there would be no hot water. The TMO took a long time to fix anything. They were also not very good at communicating. I would send them maintenance repairs and often I would not get any replies.

Previous fire

14. There was a fire in 2013 in Flat 66, which was the flat below us. My mum and I were at the flat and saw smoke from the window. The fire was not dangerous. I saw the fire brigade come in so I did not think to leave the building because the fire was under control. This is the only fire that I have seen in the tower and it was quickly dealt with.
15. The electricity inside our flat would also go off sometimes. This happened on average a few times a year.

Communal areas and fire safety

16. I have never been given fire safety advice by the TMO or RBKC and I never saw them carrying out fire safety checks. There have never been any fire drills at the tower and I have never seen the fire brigade carrying out inspections of the building either. I cannot remember there being any signs about what to do in the event of a fire. I only know what I have been taught at school, which is to leave the building via the stairs and not to use the lifts.
17. Throughout the tower, I am not aware of any fire safety measures. There were no fire extinguishers, sprinklers, communal fire alarms and fire blankets at Grenfell Tower. I also do not remember there being a dry riser on my floor.
18. Outside the front door to our flat was the rubbish chute area. On the other side of this was the stairwell and opposite both of these were two lifts. The flats were either side of this central area. The communal lobby on the 10th floor was generally kept clean and tidy and it was well lit.

19. The lifts in the tower were very unreliable. They broke down many times so I used the staircase quite a lot. Sometimes the lifts would take around a week to fix. This was an inconvenience because our flat was on the 10th floor. The stairs were wide enough to fit two people, side by side. The doors to the stairwell were normally closed and were quite old. I cannot remember them ever being replaced. They were heavy and would close by themselves.

Refurbishment

20. Most of the refurbishment happened while I was away at university. However I remember that there was a lot of noise in the area in 2013 when I was revising for my A Levels, because of the refurbishment. Whenever I was in London visiting my family I would help my mum deal with the contractors by arranging appointments and also letting them into the house.
21. The cladding made the building stand out. I had no fire safety concerns because I was young back then so I did not really think about the safety aspects of the building. But now I look back and I am shocked that there were no fire extinguishers or fire doors.

13 June

22. 13 June was a normal day. I was in a research lab at university that day working on a project. I was there until 5pm and I got home at around 5.30pm.
23. When I arrived at home I started working on a presentation that I had coming up. I was preparing my slides all evening and slept at around 11pm.

14 June

24. I normally leave my phone on silent when I am sleeping but that night I forgot. While I was sleeping I kept hearing my phone going off with the sounds of incoming messages. However I did not look at it because I had an important presentation coming up and needed the sleep.
25. I woke up at around 6am and saw that I had received the following messages from Lucy:
- 2:02: Grenfell right now** [with an image of Grenfell Tower on fire].

3:08: Hey the whole building is on flames, I'm pretty sure we've lost all our stuff, cat too.

3:08: Mariems up there still. Mom and dad are ok.

3:52: I'm very sorry Jen all your cash is lost...It burned in the flames

26. I was not sure if it was real. I was still half asleep. I knew that I had been getting messages but I did not look at the phone. I messaged Lucy:

06:22: Omg seriously everything.

06:22: ???!

27. Lucy replied:

06:22: Everything.

06:22: Mom lost [REDACTED] of her own money she doesn't know how much of your money she held.

28. I went back to sleep because I did not know what was happening. I thought it was all a dream and I did not appreciate the full extent of what was happening. I think that I was in denial. I properly woke up at around 8am to the following messages from Lucy:

06:24: Me and Paul got evacuated from our place and now we're just outside.

06:25: I have not heard from Mariem since 2:20.

06:25: She was trapped.

06:25: I'm so scared for her.

06:25: I'm so worried.

29. I turned on the television and saw the fire burning my home. The flames were ferocious and were bright orange. I burst into tears. My home was burning and I was away from my family. I felt hopeless and confused. I realised then that it was all real. I was initially in denial because of how unbelievable the fire looked so it felt like I was watching a movie. The whole thing felt appallingly helpless, particularly as we had no idea how many people were dead or alive at the time. I felt deeply saddened by the loss of my family home but it feels trivial compared to all the loss of life and how much this has wounded people in the whole area. I strongly felt that I needed to come home and try to repair some of it but also grew more hurt and angrier about the

situation.

30. I messaged Lucy again:

08:26: *Is mum okay?*

08:26: *Was she there*

08:26: *Is dad okay*

08:27: *Is anyone hurt*

31. I could not function properly. I messaged my supervisor and said that I was going to be late. I called my mum, Lucy and dad just to fully make sure that they were all fine. It was heartbreaking being so far away from them given that our home had just burnt. When I spoke to Lucy she told me that Mariem was still inside. I could hear how stressed Lucy was. The fact that people were being told to stay put was upsetting and anxiety-provoking.

32. I just kept thinking about all of the people that I knew who lived there. Mariem was still in there and I just thought the worst because I could see on TV that the fire was blazing. I was glad that my mum and dad made it out but also started thinking the worst. What if they had inhaled smoke? Were they really OK? What if they had never made it out? I felt and still feel hugely let down by the people who were meant to look after us (RBKC, TMO, the government) and greatly humbled by the efforts of the fire service. It is still very difficult to talk about and heartbreaking to think about.

33. I went to the university after lunch but did not do anything. I had a presentation on Thursday 15 June and I arranged with the university to give my presentation early in the morning and to be excused to leave after it. The university was very understanding and I was able to leave after my presentation.

34. I went home, packed and booked a train to be at London Euston for 5pm. I met my mum at Premier Inn Hotel and stayed with her for a few days. This was a really difficult time for my family. We had just lost our home, friends and all of our belongings.

35. I went back [REDACTED] on Sunday 18 June because I had a placement for four weeks that I was starting. I had to go back for the placement because otherwise I would have fallen behind with my university degree.

Aftermath of fire

36. After the placement I stayed with my mum at the Premier Inn Hotel in Kensington for a few months and I started the master's course in September 2017.

37. During my stay with my mum, I went to Westway and Rugby Portobello quite a lot because everything was based there. I went there to see people and it was also a hub for advice. I did not see much of RBKC. There was no support other than from the amazing community. My sister and I took the initiative and were doing everything ourselves; we were focussed on making sure that our mum was fine.

38. We have all been affected by the fire. It has created worry and fear. My mum could not sleep with the lights off for many months after the fire and she was not able to eat properly too. Lucy was also affected greatly by it. She was not able to work. I think it has been harder for her because she has been in London throughout with my mum and had to keep strong for her. I am more anxious now than I was before the fire. If I hear a fire alarm I get jumpy. I am also more worried about losing things.

39. It is hard to understand how such a massive fire could occur in this day and age, in the UK, how quick it was, the way you could clearly see it through all the windows and how long it took to be taken out. Other terrible events occurred shortly before the Grenfell fire, like the Manchester Arena bombing and the London terrorist attacks at places I often go. It has been as though these events have literally come closer and closer to home, and so left me feeling unsafe anywhere and hopeless, despite normally being a very level-headed person. I hated feeling so far away and useless, and hearing about how people were waving white flags at their windows when the fire services couldn't yet reach the higher floors.

40. I am angry that the lives of the people who lived in Grenfell Tower are misrepresented by sections of the media. I have seen that residents have been subject to public vilification from the media with untrue stories, and portrayed to be

ungrateful and labelled in a negative light. I am disappointed but unsurprised that the council have done little to defend us.

41. It is important that change happens so that lives are not lost unnecessarily again. I hope this inquiry can get to the truth of what happened. It is vital to me that proper change in social housing and fire/building safety are put into effect promptly. All the families will never get real closure and be able to move on with their lives until the people and industries key in making decisions take genuine responsibility and are held accountable for the parts they played, as I cannot see how this could ever be just considered an accident or a shocking tragedy when it feels so strongly like the culmination of colossal neglect and indifference.

I believe that the facts stated in this statement are true.

I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

SIGNED: Jenny Quang

DATE: 25/6/18

Jenny Quang