

THE GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

Witness Statement of Jacqueline McGrath

I Jacqueline McGrath, of [REDACTED], will say as follows:-

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a Core Participant in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and was present at the fire, outside the Tower, on June 14 2017. I lived in Barandon Walk, near Grenfell Tower, where I still live now.
2. I was born in Lambeth, on [REDACTED]
3. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I stopped working there as a result of the fire and the traumatic effect that it had on me.
4. I lived at [REDACTED] Barandon Walk] with my daughter, [REDACTED], who was [REDACTED] at the time of the fire, and son, C[laud], who was 17 at the time. Tejinder Paul Dhillon, who is also a Core Participant, who was my then boyfriend, often stayed there.
5. I have lived in Barandon Walk for 17 years, in the same flat. It is a council-owned flat, owned by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), and managed by the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (TMO).
6. This statement is mainly about what I saw on 14 June 2017 and deals with what the Inquiry has called 'Phase 1' matters, setting out what happened to us when the fire broke out and consumed Grenfell Tower. I will provide greater detail of 'Phase 2' matters as the Inquiry

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progresses although I will set out some brief details of what are Phase 2 matters later in this statement.

7. I believe that the facts stated in this following witness statement are true. Where I wish part of my statement to be redacted before publication on the Inquiry website I have placed this text in bold and [square brackets].

The evening of 13 June 2017 and the morning 14 June 2017

8. I was resident at [redacted] **Barandon Walk**] at the time of the fire. Both my children had gone to bed, and Tejinder Paul Dhillon was staying that evening.
9. It was a nice quiet evening. It was quite warm, and we were in the flat.
10. I became aware of the fire at about 1am. I was awake, as myself and Paul were watching a film. Paul pointed out there was a bright orange light behind the curtain, and so I went over to open the curtain to see what it was.
11. I immediately saw the fire. At that stage, the fire was only small, and was contained to a few floors. It was possibly burning from floor four to floor eight at that point, but I cannot be certain. It had certainly begun to blaze on the outside of flats above the fourth floor at that stage.
12. There was some thick black smoke coming off the fire, but nowhere near as much as it would be later on.
13. I think I said, "Oh my fucking god, my worst nightmare has come true, that building is on fire!"
14. The reason I felt this was because I had been concerned about the insulation prior to the fire. I had anticipated that this might have happened, so seeing the fire confirmed my worst fears. This was because I had seen a TV programme a few years before, I do not remember which programme. In the programme someone had dropped a cigarette and it had set their loft insulation alight. The insulation on Grenfell resembled what I had seen on this TV programme, so I was concerned.

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15. I walked out to the end of my patio area, [REDACTED] of [Barandon Walk]. I then shouted down to my children, who were on the floor below (our flat is a two-level maisonette) that Grenfell was on fire, and that they needed to get up.
16. Both [REDACTED] and C[laud], my children, came onto the balcony. Paul said that we had to get out, so we came out of the flat and ran to the other end of the block, towards Grenfell Walk.
17. I leant over the wall at the end of the Walkway, and looked down towards the entrance of Grenfell.

Outside Grenfell Tower

18. I then saw the fire again. It had grown larger, and appeared to have gone up several more floors.
19. I could hear people shouting and screaming down below. It was a mixture of people who lived in the area, but I do not remember seeing many firefighters at this point. I do not remember hearing any fire fighters at this point.
20. I remember [REDACTED] saying to me, "Come back from the wall", and so I did.
21. I stayed on the walkway for maybe half an hour. We mostly stood there and looked on in disbelief.
22. I realised that people on the side of the block that was not on fire were unaware of what was happening on the other side. Some could not see the fire, I thought, but could hear the commotion, and so were looking out their windows or shouting over to us.
23. I saw two young men, hanging out the window, shouting to us in the walkway. I remember shouting back saying, "Get out!", but they shouted back saying, "There's too much smoke!" I did not know who they were, as I had not seen them before.
24. I believe they might have been on the sixth or seventh floor.

25. I remember seeing a fire fighter on the ground level. He was shouting up, using a megaphone, saying, "Stay there, we're coming to get you." He was a black, male fire fighter.
26. I was still shouting "Get out" to them. I felt they had to get out because the fire was spreading. I could not believe that the fire fighter was insisting they stayed in their flat. I thought, if these people stay in their flats, won't the fire come to them?
27. I remember there being a breeze, and every time the breeze hit the building, it would push the fire around the side of the building. It was blowing around the other side of the building (the Academy side). I was able to see it as I was moving from one end of the walkway to the other, and was able to see both sides of the building.
28. A fire fighter on the ground level shouted up to us, he was relatively old compared to the other fire fighters, and a white male. He heard me shouting telling people to get out, and he then shouted up to me, saying, "Shut up, don't tell them to do that!"
29. I remember I shouted back at him and said, "Fuck off", and continued to shout to tell people to get out of the building. This would have been at approximately 1.30am.
30. I remember seeing panels falling off the Tower, onto the walkway and the ground.
31. A policeman and a fire fighter came up to the walkway, and said, "Get out, it's dangerous", but did not specify to where. So myself and Paul and my children went back through Barandon Walk.
32. I knocked on my neighbours' doors as I went through, just to try and encourage them to get out. There was an [REDACTED] woman, called Maria, and Paul went to knock on her door. I also knocked on our neighbour Lian's door. Paul went and knocked on a few I think.
33. There is a disabled man, I do not remember his name, but Paul helped him down the stairs.
34. We had then left the building and walked onto Grenfell Road. There was a small brick wall and I sat on there with [REDACTED] and C[laud], but Paul left to try and check on our neighbours to make sure they were okay.

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35. We stayed in that spot until 6 or 7am. We did not do anything there, I mainly stayed there and spoke to neighbours. I spoke to them about the fire, obviously, and how tragic it was. We were all just in shock.
36. From where I was sat I could still here people screaming from the building. The police had blocked off the road, and so there were not any vehicles coming up or down it, except for fire engines.
37. I was talking to our neighbours and I asked, "Where are the fire engines? How are they going to get down this road?" I was aware at that point that the construction of a new school behind Grenfell Tower had restricted access for fire engines. This meant the only access they had was down Grenfell Road.
38. Eventually, more fire engines came throughout the night. I cannot remember or even guess how many.

The events directly after

39. I had been trying to reach Faye Murray, who is a good friend of mine. I had been trying to call her during the night, and eventually spoke to her shortly after 7am. She lived a few minutes' walk away, and she came down to see me.
40. At that point it felt like lots of media crews were appearing, it was very busy and hectic, and then Faye arrived. Myself and my kids wanted somewhere to lie down, and so we went back to her house for a while for a cup of tea.
41. I then went back to Barandon Walk, because I wanted to be there, with my neighbours. I wanted to see how everyone was doing. There were police on the doorways, and they told me that I was not allowed back in, and they mentioned that falling debris was a risk.
42. Because the weather was so hot, we decided to stay outside, so we remained sitting on the wall.
43. In the days that followed the fire, myself and my two children stayed at my friend Faye's flat. We stayed there for four nights.

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44. The nearby St Clement's Church had a large amount of clothes, food and water, and so we frequently visited there to collect these items.
45. I was worried about our two cats (Toffee and Mixie), who were in the Walkway. Thankfully they were fine when we returned, although one of them has behaved unusually since, and does not eat as much.
46. After four days we were allowed to go back into the flat. There was some debris on the patio, mainly insulation from the Tower.
47. I did not make contact with the Council or TMO at any point. They did not try and make contact with me either. I had a mobile phone, and the TMO would have had the number. They did not ring me at any point however.
48. Looking back, I am really shocked that they didn't try to speak to me. I was a resident, I still am a resident, in one of their properties that had been evacuated by the police, and they made no effort to contact me to make sure I was okay.

The months following the fire

49. The first issue when we returned was that the hot water was cut off immediately. We were having to boil water to use it for showers. I think this went on for approximately two months. We had to go to neighbours' houses, or relatives' houses, for showers.
50. Neighbours were telling me that I could visit the Westway and be allocated a hotel, so that I could get housing.
51. I did not want to be rehoused, even temporarily, because I love the flat that I have in [Barandon Walk], and I have elderly neighbours who were also staying, and they needed people near them.
52. At no point after the fire have either RBKC or TMO ever got in touch to help with support since the fire, in terms of housing, or to check our mental health, or anything like that. The only occasion they have done so is when they wrote letters to say when the water would be cut off, or when repairs would be taking place.

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53. We were not offered any financial support either.

54. The only support I was given was when I queued up in the Westway Centre, a few days after the fire, and RBKC were giving money to residents for food. [REDACTED]

Before the fire

55. I was never given any information about fire safety since I moved into the flat.

56. The London Fire Brigade (LFB) visited once to check fire alarms. This was maybe two years ago.

57. I have never had any issues with electricity problems in my flat.

Concerns about fire safety

58. I did not have any concerns about fire safety in my block prior to the fire. It was not something that crossed your mind. I was happy and content and I did not think about such things.

Concerns about modifications to the Tower

59. I remember having concerns about the insulation. I have explained these in paragraph 14 of this statement.

60. When I was walking to and from the flat, I would see the refurbishment taking place. I would see the yellow insulation being applied to the building, and I thought it looked flammable. As explained earlier, this was because I had seen a TV programme in which a man had dropped a cigarette on insulation, and it had caught alight very quickly.

61. My father had put a large amount of insulation in his roof a few years ago, and we had had a conversation about whether or not the insulation in his roof was flammable. It looked like cotton wool, and that it might catch alight.

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62. When I saw the insulation being installed at Grenfell Tower, in the year or so of the refurbishment, I remembered the conversation I had had with my father about his loft insulation, and I thought that the Grenfell insulation also looked flammable. Despite his concerns, my father had installed the roof insulation. I was very young at the time and did not challenge him on it, even though we had discussed it briefly. My main fear had been that someone would drop a cigarette when they were in the loft, but as no one in our family smoked, that was not a major concern.
63. The other concern that I had was that I did not know why the refurbishment was taking place.
64. There was a rumour in the community that the reason for the refurbishment was to 'prettify' the building for the luxury flats nearby. It was the sort of conversation you have when you're walking in the street, and you see your neighbour, and you would both look up at the building and discuss what was going on. I would say to people, "Why are they doing this?" and I remember people telling me they had heard it was to improve the look of the building for people who lived nearby. I cannot remember who said this however.
65. This had not really satisfied my curiosity, in terms of providing a simple answer. I continued to wonder why it was being done, but did not take any steps to find out.

Conclusion

66. I want to emphasis how wrong it was that there was a 'Stay Put' policy and that it was kept in place, when it was clearly not working. I had an argument with a fire fighter about this, who told me to 'shut up', because I had criticised it. They should have revised that policy as it was apparent to me, and everyone else observing from Grenfell Walk, that it should have been taken down.
67. It has been devastating for us. I do not wish to say more, or to talk any further about this, as it has been so traumatic.
68. If the Inquiry feels this would be helpful, I would be happy to be contacted and asked to give evidence, but it will depend on how I feel at the time. I am happy to be asked about this, so I can make an informed decision at the time.

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Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I confirm that I am willing that the statement forms part of the evidence before the Inquiry, and may be published on the Inquiry's website, save for redactions indicated in the text, and those applied by the Inquiry.

Signed:A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'JMcGrath', is written over a horizontal line.**Jacqueline McGrath****Dated:** ____ 15 June 2018