


FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOHN GERALD FOLAN


I MR JOHN FOLAN OF [REDACTED] Testerton Walk, Lancaster West Estate, W11 1WQ WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:

1. I make this statement in support of Phase One proceedings of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry
2. I make this statement based on my own knowledge save where stated otherwise in which case it is to the best of my knowledge and belief.
3. I am currently single and am self-employed.
4. My full name is John Gerald Folan and my date of birth is [REDACTED]
5. I have been residing in the area all my life with my Father, William Folan DOB 19.01.1933 (deceased 31.07.2006), my mother Mary Kate Folan ([REDACTED]) and my sister Kathleen, ([REDACTED]) and my brother Stephen ([REDACTED]) have been living at [REDACTED], Testerton Walk, Lancaster West Estate, W11 1WQ since 19.05.1976.

Signed  .....

Dated... 12/05/18 .....


6. I went to a local school in St. Charles Square, W10 from aged 5 to aged 11 and then I went onto a secondary school in Addison Walk, Holland Park, W14. I left school aged 17 years having obtained around 12 GCSE's.
7. I starting working part time in Woolworths in Portobello Road, W11. I became an instore Supervisor and I was then promoted to Office Manager and keyholder. My main responsibilities to do with cash handling and invoices predominantly.
8. I was employed at Woolworths between 1993 and 1999 over 6 years in total whilst living at Testerton Walk the whole time.
9. I further worked at John Lewis in Oxford Street and thereafter I went back to Woolworths part-time while I was undertaking my Driving Instructor course and due to my father's ill health between 2004 – 2008.
10. My father became unwell with renal failure, he was diagnosed in early January 2001 and started on dialysis 17 March 2001, three times a week for four hours.
11. He started being treated in the Mint wing at St. Mary's Paddington. Initially he went on the underground from Latimer Road to Paddington on the Hammersmith and City line. Then the dialysis unit was transferred to St. Charles Hospital, and I started to drive him in the morning at 6.30 am and I would collect him in my lunch break from Woolworths, who were reasonably flexible.
12. My father was transferred to a purpose-built dialysis, high dependency unit and renal unit at the back of Hammersmith Hospital.

Signed..........  
Dated.....17/05/18.....

13. Following a down-turn in health from about October 2005 where he got septicemia which affected his feet so he had mobility issues. My father's health deteriorated and he passed away in July 2006.
14. In 2010 I completed by Instructor exams and now have regular students. I am happy with my career as it gives me enough time and flexibility to accompany my mother to her various medical appointments.
15. My students come from a diverse cross section and are based mainly in West London including the walkways. I have not been happy with the TMO dealings with any repair issues we have had in our flat. I shall provide full details following further disclosure but summarise some issues I have had with the TMO below.

(i) We had two leaks one above the kitchen door and the other at the the front door. Numerous calls made by me, five different plumbers and a surveyor came out eventually. It was fixed but it took over 9 weeks to fix, damage to the hall wall paper and no-one ever explained to us the source or why it was so difficult to sort it out.

(ii) I have a garage on Hurstway Road, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] on the Lancaster West estate. I have had this garage since August 2003 to keep my car in. My car was originally kept just on the road on Whitchurch road just outside our block but it was broken into numerous times. I had items stolen, I joined the waiting list for a garage and got one within 6 months.

Signed.....

Dated.....17/05/18.....


- (iii) The garage doors are on springs and one broke so I reported it. My car had just been taken out for a lesson and I didn't put the car back in as I feared the door would collapse or fall on me or on my car which is after all my livelihood.
- (iv) It took over 13 weeks for the TMO to initially fix the door. I was a given a temporary garage after a week which was better for me as it had a light. However, I had a stressful week doing pay and display at 4 hourly intervals as I didn't have a permit and I couldn't afford to have my car towed away.
- (v) When they replaced the doors in my second garage the door 2 inches too small so didn't close.
- (vi) I was then given a third garage and it had no light and the door was unstable and heavy to lift.
- (vii) I eventually went back to the original one after speaking with Robert Black who is the CEO & Head of TMO by email and it was fixed within 3 days.
- (viii) I note that my first temporary garage has still not got a door after 2 years and the TMO has to keep clearing away illegal fly tipping as the gates to the walkway garages is frequently broken. The garage remains unrented over 2 years later which is potential money lost for future and current repairs much needed and long overdue which I find totally

Signed.....

Dated.....17/05/18.....



- (ix) incomprehensible and a huge waste.
- (x) We have had the original kitchen, WC and bathroom since 1976 and the bathroom began to age the tiles discoloured, the paint discoloured and flaked off. The kitchen was old fashioned in style but my mother had looked after it so it was not in need of actual repair. She requested on a few occasions for it to be replaced but was told no.
- (xi) The government then gave them the decent homes grant. There was a previously one circa 10/15 years ago and due to the mismanagement of the TMO poor financial controls and forward planning they spent too much on some of the properties so by the time it came to our block's turn they had run out of money. This happened to other people we knew at this end of the walk.
- (xii) This time we got assessed and as we were one of the tenants who still had the original kitchen bathroom and WC fittings which the surveyor who came out was very surprised to find we were given the opportunity to have a new kitchen WC and bathroom of a standard design. We could choose from a limited choice of colours for the tiles, paint, floors, and handles. We were asked to make a decision very quickly and when we asked to think about it he said no we have to decide here and now as we have lots of properties to upgrade.

Signed..........  
Dated.....17/05/18.....

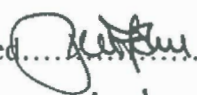
(xiii) We found it a very stressful experience. We were given a lead time of 3 weeks but it took closer to 6- 8 weeks. Wates, the company doing the works, didn't turn up for 7/8 days, the liaison officer gave us the wrong contact number so we spent the summer waiting in for people who never turned up on time or gave explanations. 20 different contractors came into our home in this period. For example, one person would paint the kitchen but not the bathroom.

(xiv) It all seemed very inefficient to me and I was trying to juggle lessons with pupils and being in for contractors, who seemed to be very stretched which meant that residents got treated poorly.


16. On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June the day I had been working giving driving lessons as usual. My brother, mother and I were all at home that night. I was doing the cooking [REDACTED]

17. We are all usually all in our bedrooms around 22:00, preparing to go to sleep as my brother leaves for work normally just after 08:15 in the morning. It varies for me what time I leave for work, depending on my lesson schedule.

18. That night I was in my room around 22:00/22:30. My bedroom and my mother's bedroom and the bathroom are on the first floor – at entry level -where you come into our flat but other flats in the block are laid in reverse. Our flat is three

Signed..........  
Dated.....17/05/18.....

19. bedroomed but there are studios, but I believe the majority of the flats are two bedrooms.
20. I am always a light sleeper and woke up at approximately 01:00 hearing the words "fire" and people shouting and running across the grass areas outside our blocks which are known and called "the Greens". I looked out of the window and saw 3 or 4 people running across the greens towards a gate. I noticed lots of lights were on in Barandon Walk. I looked at my bedside clock they were shouting "Let me out" as a gate on the green they thought was locked/closed which was in fact not.
21. My mum wasn't sleeping well and had been mainly in her bedroom since her [REDACTED] as she couldn't negotiate the stairs that easily. then as her arm was very painful and she couldn't lie down properly and she had hurt her foot which had swollen up [REDACTED].
22. I checked on my Mum and then my brother Stephen was awake his bedroom his on the ground floor where our kitchen, living room, and WC is. All the flats are made with windows on one side which overlook the Greens, and the other side faces into the communal area of each block.
23. My brother came up to our floor and went out outside onto the walkway ramps to see what all the noise about, and if there was a fire. If so, where was it?
24. He came back into the flat and told my mum and I that Grenfell tower was on fire. It was roughly about 01:00 I estimate.

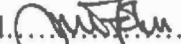
Signed..........  
Dated.....17/05/18.....

There was a little bit of smoke in the communal areas and you could smell smoke and the walkways. I could hear some sirens in the distance as Bramley Road was closed for gas repairs between Bramley Road and St. Anne's Villas so they couldn't get down there. I heard a helicopter which seemed to be on the scene quite quickly.

25. By this time my mum was listening to the radio LBC and started to hear news about a fire in west London. We turned on the TV in the sitting room and there was news of a fire although the location was vague as it was simply said there was a fire in tower block in west London.

26. Lights were coming on in the neighbouring blocks which is unusual at about 01:30/01:45 and we could hear frenzied footsteps in the communal area which is lino. This means that you could hear the footsteps and the walls are very thin and not soundproofed properly. We had our front door ajar and Stephen mainly kept popping out to see what was going on.

27. We were still all in our nightwear originally but Stephen got dressed by then around 1.45 am I could see this on my clock quickly as it was a warm night. I helped my mum with putting her shoes and putting a dressing gown on over her arm sling which I helped put on too. Stephen urged me to get dressed and I quickly put on jeans t shirt jumpers and trainers.

Signed..........

Dated.....17/05/18.....

28. I popped down to the kitchen where we keep my mother's medication as I was thinking ahead and wondering whether I should pack a suitcase with it in. I went into the sitting room and turned on the television and there was breaking news report about a fire in West London but no images.
29. I saw 3 firemen walking past our front door who I don't believe were carrying any breathing equipment. I opened the door we saw other residents in the nightwear leaving the building. I saw a couple of policeman and someone had knocked on our door so I presumed it was a fireman/policeman.
30. Stephen asked a passing policeman in the walkway whether it was just the bottom part of the 300 block which is closest to the tower or the whole block including [REDACTED] where we live. He replied everyone out.
31. We all then left the flat, we locked the front door. I took my mobile phone, wallet and house keys, my brother took the same.
32. We all congregated where the benches are on the walkway ("JF1"). By that time Policemen were all outside the main entrances to the walkway. I looked at my watch and it was 2:30 am.
33. We began to see more firemen coming on foot from Bramley road past Whitchurch road, who came in groups of say 10/12 and they were walking at fast pace with a sense of urgency and they were all carrying breathing apparatus on their backs or in their hands. We began to see professional photographers with tripods and long lensed cameras. I remember a Policeman being stationed at

Signed.....

Dated.....17/05/16

some of the fire exits of the garages, I presumed to stop people accessing the garages which lead directly to the base of Grenfell Tower.

34. I would say there was 40/50 people out there and maybe more like 100/120 at its peak as some residents had families who lived close by so they went down to stay with their families.

35. Some of the younger residents were filming the fire on their mobile phones but I did not.

36. The fire had really taken hold by this stage and we could clearly see it from the only place to sit which were the benches you could see the reflections of the flames on the windows on Hurstway walk. You could hear sort of crackling noises popping too which I thought was cladding coming off the building as we could see debris falling from the building. I was moving around at this time. This debris was of varying sizes and was alight. The debris was falling from the high levels. You could hear some shouting whether it was those asking for help or people at the base of the tower block. This was around 2.45/3:00 am. The flames were coming from the fifth or sixth floor almost reaching the top and the building started to be engulfed in large flames. Smoke was coming from under the walkways themselves where the garages were.

37. The Sikh and Muslim communities were very quick to come round and offer water and biscuits definitely within the first couple of hours I would say. Some

Signed ... 

Dated... 17/05/18



- of the neighbours were still fasting as it was Ramadan so they were praying.
38. The atmosphere was strange people were having problems comprehending the situation, a lot of the residents would have known people in the tower blocks. I did originally but they moved out in the 1990's.
39. We were outside until approximately 06.30/07.00 am. The church St Clements Notting Dale we had been told was open and was serving refreshments and a WC and shelter.
40. We noted that some of the residents were going back into the flats so we thought we would do the same. I made my Mum a cup of tea and toast for early breakfast.
41. I rang my sister Kathleen and we had some phone calls on the home answer phones and I had some texts and mobile calls on my phone and so did my mum and so did Stephen so we all made some phone calls.
42. Stephen got ready for work but in the end he called in to say he wouldn't be coming in as we were all anxious about the situation and how it was unfolding in front of us. It was now about 0800/0830 am we switched on the news and saw it on BBC breakfast news and then we saw it also on sky news channel. We were glued to the telly as it was weird to see somewhere you were so familiar with and part of where you grew up on national news.
43. At the back of my mind I had the thought that it would not surprise me if we all had to be evacuated again for the foreseeable future. I discussed this with Stephen and my Mum.

Signed.....

Dated.....17/05/18.....



44. I knew that we would have no heating and no hot water as this was all situated immediately under Grenfell Tower.

45. I rang my pupil who was due to have his driving test that day and I was due to take him to the test centre as he would be using my car for his test but unfortunately, I couldn't access my car as I would have to drive directly underneath Grenfell tower. I actually thought I wouldn't be able to access my car for the foreseeable future and I happened to have another pupil for a driving test on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June and I rang her to explain my situation.

46. We had my Auntie Agnes ring from [REDACTED] between 8-9 am who had seen it on the news and was very upset and told us just to get out what are you still doing in there? As she has been over to visit and has stayed with us over the years. Between the three of us we had almost a dozen phone calls.

47. Policeman knocked on our doors around 9.00/9.15 and told us to take any ID, medication, change of clothing and pack a small suitcase. We did and I got my Mum's medication and my Mum got dressed into jeans and a jersey and put on a coat.

48. From about 09:00/09:30 onwards all of us residents were outside on the benched area.

49. We just sat around with neighbours we hadn't spoken to or seen for a bit.

50. People from St. Clements bought out food for us and drink such as fruit, sandwiches, biscuits crisps, and juice and water and we began to see the

Signed..........

Dated.....17/6/18.....

community rallying around.

51. I did notice during the day people from the Red Cross who were checking on people.

52. I went into St. Clements with my Mum as her arm was painful and there was a NHS triage centre, a GP and 2 nurses who looked and assessed mum's arm. They re-did her sling and tightened it up.

53. We were milling around waiting for someone to update us and tell us what was happening.

54. I then left about 17:30/18:00 to see a friend who was a former colleague who lives close by. She asked me if we were all okay and did we need somewhere to stay for the night. I said that it'd be great and really helpful, as she was based locally, if we got the okay, we could back earlier to our flat which is what we really wanted to do, as we had all been up most of the night and just wanted to put our heads down. My friend told me that she had debris in her garden.

55. Stephen was waiting with my Mum by the benches so he brought her over to join me at my friend's flat as we still waiting to see if we could get back in. The time was about 1900/1930 as my mum wanted to have somewhere inside to sit down and have a cup of tea as the situation was still very unclear and unsettling.

56. I stayed with her there sleeping on my friend's sofa as my Mum shared a bedroom with her as she only had two single beds.

Signed........

Dated.....17/05/15.....

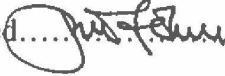
57. Stephen rang me about 2200 to say that there were letting people back in but at which time I thought we were already settled and it was getting late. I was concerned that maybe if we over there they might change their minds and we would have to be evacuated again. Stephen came back and stayed in the flat, so we had peace of mind that we hadn't left the flat unattended overnight as it was a well- publicised tragedy by now.
58. The next morning, I came back to the flat first as Stephen was just about to leave for work and I had a shower and changed and went back to collect my mother around 0930/10.00
59. I started cancelling arranged lessons with pupils over the next few weeks at least and got in contact with the two pupils who had to cancel their tests.
60. It was until that day that people from the TMO, NHS mental health trauma team, Red Cross, Police knocked on our door checking to see if we were okay if we needed anything.
61. Some doors had been apparently knocked down by the Police/Fire Brigade as we were asked whether our front door was damaged and needed repairing.
62. I answered a lot of texts and calls and went out to get some food essentials. We watched it a lot on the news it became all consuming.
63. There were a number of meetings of residents and issues with security and the TMO etc. I shall however provide more details further to disclosure in this matter.

Signed.....

Dated.....17/05/18

## STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe the contents of this Statement to be true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed..........

Dated.....17/05/15.....

**JOHN GERALD FOLAN**