

**Witness Statement of: Joseph Bryan**

**No. of statement: 1**

**Exhibits: None**

**Date of statement: 08/05/18**

## **GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOSEPH BRYAN**

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I, **Joseph Bryan**, will say as follows:-

1. This statement is my account of events that took place on Tuesday 13 June 2017 into the early hours of Wednesday 14 June 2017, which I make for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. I would wish to make a further statement to address issues falling to be dealt with in Phase 2 of the Inquiry.

#### Background

2. My name is Joseph Harold Bryan but I am known to everyone as Harry.
3. My date of birth is [REDACTED] English is my first language.
4. Prior to the fire I was in very good health. I have done tai chi for over twenty years to stay in good health. It is great for peace of mind and the martial arts side of things keeps my joints in good check.
5. I play jazz on the guitar and used to be a full time musician. I travelled with my music and lived in places like Munich and Holland. I returned to the UK and, unfortunately

Joseph Bryan

because of DJs, the requirement for live bands had dwindled so I was no longer able to do this full time.

6. I started working [REDACTED] as a Retail Assistant in the stock room. I work Sunday to Thursday nights from 10:00pm to 07:30am. My hours are long because I don't get paid for breaks. I am responsible for getting stock ready for the day shift the following day. The job is quite physical but I enjoyed it and it paid the bills.
7. In 2001, I split from my ex partner with whom I was living. It was her flat so I was forced to approach the council and declare myself homeless. After being placed in a hotel and then hostel, I was eventually housed in Testerton Walk in 2003 where I rent a studio flat. The flat is on the third floor of the block and is in my name only. It's felt like home ever since moving in and I had no intention of leaving. My girlfriend, Bitte moved in with me in 2013.
8. From the time I moved into Testerton Walk, I noticed a real community spirit. I was not really part of it because, unlike my neighbours, a lot of my friends and family live outside the area. I did not grow up here. However, the trauma of the fire seems to have really drawn the community closer together.
9. Prior to the fire I would speak to my immediate neighbours. What I noticed was there was a real diverse mix of cultures. I had neighbours who were English, Arabic and Eastern European. I did not socialise with them but would certainly stop to say hello. I know that the older lady from the Arabic family next door had trouble with her knees so they moved to a ground floor flat. Once people moved into the area, they would rarely move out.
10. I knew Steven Power to say hello to. He had two dogs and I would often see him out and about walking them. Sadly, he died in the fire. I knew other people but they were more acquaintances I would say hello to and did not know their name.

#### 14th June

11. I was on annual leave from work this week so decided to meet my friend with whom I am in a jazz duo band. We got together around 7pm and had only really planned to rehearse for a couple of hours. However, before we knew it, it was after midnight so I

left Ladbroke Grove and made my way home.

12. I was by the petrol station on St. Mark's road and was planning on taking the shortcut, through Grenfell Tower (the Tower) underneath by where our garages are. En route there are lots of trees so I did not notice anything out of the ordinary until I turned the corner by the Methodist Church. As I turned the corner there was what I can only describe as a huge waft of fumes. I could see the Tower ahead of my blazing with fire. It lit up the area like a beacon. I could not believe my eyes.
13. Around 02:30am I approached the corner of Silchester Road by the Lancaster Estate. I could see lots of police and firemen. They had cordoned off the area and closed all through access. Both neighbours and passer-bys had gathered around the area. This was approximately 20 to 30 yards from the Tower itself. One policeman explained to me that I would need to go around the Tower to the front entrance to access my flat.
14. I could not take my eyes off the Tower. It felt so surreal. At this point I could only see fire and a thick black plume of smoke surrounding the area and rising into the sky. I could only see the east facade of the Tower at this point. The flames were on this side in what I can only describe as a weird, arched shape. It was arching over to the left towards the south facade and across the top of the building. The flames also seemed to extend around to the north facade.
15. It thought it was odd because, prior to this, whenever there was a fire in the Tower, it was always self contained. You would only ever see a burnt out flat. Here, the flames were on the outside. I was so shocked. It was like something you see in a film.
16. One of my friends later told me that he had seen someone jumping from the Tower. Residents were pleading with the police to allow them to put mattresses out so people could jump and it would break their falls. The police did not seem interested and were pushing people back away from the Tower, further restricting the access.
17. I carried on walking back to my flat trying to reassure myself that the fire fighters had everything under control. They had a strong presence and I assumed they were dealing with it accordingly.
18. As I entered my block I noticed some of my neighbours knocking other neighbours'

doors. They were telling them to leave the block. I thought maybe they were overreacting so I continued to head upstairs.

19. I woke Bitte up and told her about the fire. She got up and we both went to the window to have a look. By this time the fire had got worse. I remember Bitte being so shocked and saying something like "Jesus Christ!". It was at this point I realised the gravity of the situation and that my neighbours' lives were at risk. I began to panic but tried to remain calm on the outside for Bitte.
20. After about 10 minutes of being at home, one of my neighbours knocked on our door. He said that the police were evacuating our block and wanted everyone out. The little hope I had remaining that the fire fighters would be able to contain it began to fade.
21. At this point, the Tower was blazing so fiercely and everyone seemed worried about it collapsing. People were discussing the prospect of the floors above the fire toppling over onto our block. I had visions of the Tower collapsing like the Twin Towers. It was all so surreal.
22. The wind was blowing the smoke in a North-Westerly direction away from our block but we could still smell the burning. It smelt like burning chemicals or plastic.
23. Around 3am, Bitte and I left our flat and moved onto what we refer to as the podium. The podium is the walkway between Hurstway and Testerton Walks. People from both blocks had already gathered around here and were sitting on the walls and standing watching the Tower. There were some people in the communal garden. Everyone seemed to be in a state of shock. The refurbishment gave the impression to all residents that the building was of a high specification and would be safer. No one could believe how something that was supposed to be modern, robust and resilient was alight like this.
24. As we got out, I noticed that the fire had become more intense. It looked like it was spiralling around each facade. The whole area was filled with thick, black smoke. It had spread across most of the Tower and debris was now falling. It looked like huge lights flying through the air and falling to the ground. I now believe this was the cladding. Huge chunks were landing everywhere and showering the communal garden in front of us.

25. By this point, the firefighters were on the roof terraces of Testerton Walk hosing the tower. They were doing what they could but it was spreading so fast. I remember looking at them and thinking the spray from the hoses is not effective. It was only, at best, reaching the bottom half of the tower. I kept thinking about the forest fires in America and how they deploy helicopters to collect water and then drop it onto the fire. I could not understand why this or something more was not being done.
26. I did not make any calls to anyone in the Tower or my neighbours. I did, however, call a few friends to let them know I was ok. I know one friend's ex wife had phoned him too and asked him to collect their sons and take them back to his house, out of the area.
27. All the time I was witnesses the Tower on fire I did not hear any fire alarms. I just heard people screaming for help and sirens from the emergency services. I tried to stay composed because I was not the one losing close friends and family like my neighbours were but inside I felt utterly panicked. I felt helpless but there was nothing anyone could do but sit, wait and hope. The thought of people's lives being lost and others' losing everything they own, and possibly loved ones was too much to bear.
28. I saw some windows open but they all had people screaming and pleading at the top of their voices things like "Please! Help me.". These were from residents around the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> floor. I saw firefighters putting ladders on the side of the building to try and rescue people. There were no fire engines in the immediate vicinity of the Tower because of the access. I do not know why this was not considered by the Town Planning Officer.
29. Hours were passing and the sun was rising. It was a warm evening but everyone outside was huddled together. We were still not allowed back in our flats so were all trying to figure out where to go and who to speak to. There was a real sense of unity that I had not experienced before.
30. Around 6am, the area seemed to be swamped with journalists. Somehow, even press from America turned up. It got ridiculous. By 10am it was chaos. No one from the authorities were helping us and we were reliant on information being fed through from fellow residents. When we eventually heard from the council, they simply confirmed what we already knew. They offered no additional help or support that what was already being offered by local organisations and charities on the street level.

31. Metaphorically, people were spinning around. No one really knew what to do. All the different communities were helping everyone. The Moroccan community came around and gave us all bottles of water and food.
32. By 10am, people were turning up in their bus loads. Journalists were sat in cars, eating their sandwiches from their packed lunches gawping and taking pictures. It fuelled anger and frustration in all of us. One of my neighbours and I said in disbelief that soon they will be starting 'Grenfell Tours'. It was sick.
33. The Christian Centre on Latimer Road opened up to people and various other organisations offered for people to stay but I felt there were others more in need so I called a friend and arranged to stay at his. Bitte stayed with her friend.
34. As we left, I noticed that our communal garden, the roof terraces and Grenfell Road had debris everywhere. Kensington Academy was covered in soot and dust. The flames seemed to have gone but the Tower was glowing amber. The thick, black smoke was still looming over our neighbourhood.

#### Impact

35. I stayed with friends for the next two or three days but began to worry about going back to work on the Sunday. I did not feel safe returning the next day because the smoke was still billowing from the Tower and you could smell it from the other side of Portobello Road.
36. My mum lives in Antigua and news of the fire reached her local news station. She called really worried to check that I was ok. I was so surprised because I did not think it was that high profile hence not calling her. In hindsight, I was in a state of shock and trudging through each day on auto pilot.
37. A few days after the fire, a rumour was circulating that some of the residents in my block had ignored the evacuation and were stowed away in their flat. I was worrying about having to go back to work on the Sunday and wanted to get fresh clothes. I also think my subconscious just wanted to be home for a sense of normality and escapism.
38. I decided to go back to the flat after three day. When I approached the area, I could still

smell the smoke strongly. It was unreal. I went to work on Sunday night but as soon as I got there I knew I was not going to be able to function. I spoke to my manager and explained the situation. He asked if there was anything they could do but there wasn't so he granted me two days compassionate leave. I went back on Tuesday night but still did not feel ready. I was emotionally drained.

39. Seeing the Tower and living under it was, and still is, harrowing. At this point, no one knew if the tower was structurally stable so in addition to having a visual reminder of the fire, we were living in fear for our own, and the remaining survivors' safety. This stemmed a deep rooted anxiety. The smell of the fire was also lingering.
40. When Theresa May visited, she just spoke to police and didn't seem concerned with anyone in community. The Mayor was speaking to people in Silchester Road but Nicholas Patrick Grant was nowhere to be seen. I did not speak to anyone nor have I give a statement to anyone else.
41. The fire broke our community and since some residents have been temporarily rehoused, we are now geographically divided too.
42. The news was saturated with details of the fire and people began to flock the area; it was like we were a zoo. They would ask me which way it was to Grenfell Tower. I was outraged and became snappy and short tempered. I was struggling to cope but suppressed this because I didn't think I had any right to feel this way.
43. Both Bitte and I were worried about smoke inhalation so we attended the GP. He reassured me that I would be ok but referred me to Time To Talk for counselling. I did not think I really needed it but attended anyway. In all honesty, I was surprised at how well I was coping. In hindsight I realise that I was not coping; I had not digested the enormity; I think I just didn't know how. In my first appointment I broke down. It was like someone had opened a door and my emotions just came pouring out. I think then the gravity of what had happened truly hit me. I completed an eight week programme and then went back after about one month for a review. By this time I felt a bit more emotionally stable but far from normal. I try to stay composed for those who lost their loved ones as mark of respect but the tragedy of that night shocked me to the core in a way I never imagined was possible.

44. I am not one to take medication. I believe that the heart and mind should heal itself so have thrown myself back into tai chi for mindfulness. I no longer take as much pleasure out of life though.
45. Looking at the tower is like looking at a graveyard; saying it's 'so sad' is a gross understatement. Every time I come home or look out of my window it's like someone kicks me in my stomach. I struggle to watch disaster movies because I now have an association with the events of that night. My feelings remain raw; I don't think what I saw that night will never leave me and I am forever haunted by the belief that this could have all been avoided.

### **Statement of Truth**

I confirm that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I confirm that I am willing for the statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and published on the Inquiry's web site.

Signed:



**Joseph Bryan**

Dated:

