

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: PURSEY, SUZANNE

Age if under 18: OVER 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 7 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: S PURSEY

Date: 06/02/2018

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

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I am Suzanne PURSEY and I make this statement in relation to the fatal fire at GRENFELL TOWER on WEDNESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2017.

On TUESDAY 5<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2017 I was interviewed by Civilian Investigator AGNEW and Dc FOLEY at HESTON FIRE STATION and this is my statement from that interview. Also present was Mr Jo MCMAHON from the London Fire Brigade Union. The interview commenced at 1404 hours and concluded at 1544 hours. I made some notes of the incident which I used to refresh my memory for the purposes of the interview which I produce a copy of as my exhibit SMP1/. I also produced a map in the interview of the area showing certain points on the ground which I also produce as my exhibits SMP/2. Both of these exhibits I handed to CI AGNEW.

I may refer to a number of people in my statement who are my crew and they are, Watch Manager (WM) CHRISTMAS, Fire Fighter (FF) LANG, FF WRIGHT, Crew Manager (CM) MARKS, FF DUNCAN, FF KNAPMAN and FF HUDSON.

I have been a Fire Fighter for 10 years and I am based at HESTON Fire Station since August 2007. My rank is Fire Fighter (FF) and I am considered as competent. On TUESDAY 13<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2017 I paraded at 2000 hours on red watch G38 at HESTON Fire Station, I was detailed as driver that night on G381 a Pump Ladder (PL). A pump ladder has a 135m ladder, it's a pumping appliance so it has a pump and water on board. We can then plug into the dry riser if required. A Watch Manager (WM) will be in charge and there will be a minimum of two (2) riding in the back and in the front will be the driver and the WM.

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At about 0055 hours on WEDNESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2017 I was asleep and was woken by a call, this call was to GRENFELL TOWER. The bells went down and as I was the driver I went to the watch room where I met FF HUDSON who was in the watch room where he gave me the call slip and I made my way to the appliance. On the appliance I discussed with my guvnor WM CHRISTMAS what route to take as I didn't know the area and hadn't been to GRENFELL TOWER before and so we started making our way. The call slip stated it was a 40 pump fire and the roads we were being sent to was sent to the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT). The MDT provides us with the incident details, the call slip we would get from the watch room, it will have a map showing where we are and where other appliances are, it will show where the incident is. We can also get information on policies. The map follows the appliance and when we are closer the incident will be highlighted. A 20 pump fire is unusual so when I saw it was a 40 pump fire my first initial thought was it was going to be a factory for something that big, the call slip didn't give an exact address. The route I took was along LONDON ROAD, up to SPUR ROAD to SYON LANE onto the A4, M4 onto the HOGARTH roundabout. We went onto the GREAT WEST ROAD to HAMMERWORTH and through to SHEPHERDS BUSH straight over the big roundabout near the A40. We carried on and would have turned left into LADBROKE GROVE. FF LANG and FF WRIGHT in the back were using their phones to direct me into the incident trying to find the road we were mobilised to. We did have some difficulties because of all the one ways and trying to find the actual road. I can't remember the roads but nearer we went down WALMER ROAD and GRENFELL TOWER was on my right hand side. I saw a truck in front of us so I followed that in. I think we arrived by 0200 hours but I am not sure. By this time on the radio I was hearing lots of Fire Survivor Guidance (FSG) calls, passing on flat numbers, I think this is when I realised the severity of the incident.

We pulled up somewhere on the EAST side and I parked the appliance in the road as there were other appliance parked in front. We didn't know how to gain access, there were a few pedestrians walking around so we had to ask them how we could get to the main building, eventually we saw some other FF's so we followed them. We put our breathing apparatus on our backs and started walking down BOMORE ROAD following the leisure centre. As we turned right onto the pedestrianised bit of road in front of the main entrance of the leisure centre just on BOMORE ROAD there was a triage kind of area set up by the LAS on our right. As we turned onto where the grassed area was I saw people either being carried out or who were walking out towards the triage area. I first saw the tower when we parked up, my initial thoughts are that no one would have survived inside the building because it was so alight or the number of people that would have to be evacuated because it was night time and people would be asleep. I thought I

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can't believe that the fire brigade would send us into that as we don't go in if there is no chance of survival and because of the risk. As we walked round to the side of the leisure centre that's when we saw people being pulled or carried out to the triage area where there were a couple of people being treated by the LAS. I can't describe any of those people I saw as I didn't want to look as I chose not to. I did see some of them being given air and because I noticed a small child I didn't want to look anymore. I have been to tower block fires before and normally the fire would only be in one (1) or two (2) windows and its normally localised within a floor unless its jumped out of a window but half way up, the whole block was alight, that is what shocked me. I didn't notice at the time any unusual patterns with the fire it was just the whole thing looked alight. I could see sections of what looked like cladding coming down, some bits of the debris were on fire and they were different size pieces. The biggest bit of debris I saw coming down was maybe a couple of meters. I couldn't see exactly what the debris was as it was dark and so the pieces were silhouetted.

We were then met by a senior officer who I don't know, the guvnor WM CHRISTMAS, spoke to him trying to find out where we should go. I think he told the guvnor to make our way to the Command Unit (CU), I can't recall if I went to the CU with her or not as I know she was struggling to find it as there were a lot of vehicles. We were told to sit around the front entrance of the leisure centre and await to be given a job. It was frustrating sitting opposite the tower and hearing what was going on. There were still people coming from underneath the tunnel, being walked out mainly by that point. We were then tasked to go and find more cylinders from other machines or the OSU (Operational Support Unit), myself and FF WRIGHT made our way to some of the streets, I think we went to GRENFELL ROAD near to where BOMORE ROAD was. There had been members of the public gathering at the cordon and they were asking questions but I don't recall what questions they were asking. There we found some other crews trying to get trollies of cylinders off so we helped them and carried the cylinders back to a BA holding area and we were told to sit down and wait. They were asking if there were any EDBA wearers which some of us were. They said if we saw anyone coming out that had worn with EDBA sets to grab one and to change the cylinder and get rigged in that set which we did and we were then waiting to be sent in. I did a fire ground A test which is when you test the BA set for air and do a leak test, along with other tests. Because this test is on the fire ground, it would not be recorded in the log book.

EDBA means Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus and should last around 45 minutes depending on what you are doing. SDBA is Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus and this will last for about 30 minutes. That night I was wearing EDBA, as EDBA wearers it just means you can continue further. On

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the BA sets we have a tally, the tally communicates with our BA sets so it tells people at Entry Control who that set belongs to, our name, how much pressure we have and that tally will be inserted into our body guard. When we go under air we take that out the tally and give it to the Entry Control Officer (ECO) who will slot it into the telemetry board which will then start communicating with our BA sets. It's able to tell how much air we have, when our whistle might go off and communicates between the two (2). The whistle is an audible warning.

As I walked around to the main building I was in shock, the voices you could hear from people still in the building screaming. There was an aerial appliance trying to tackle the fire and quite a few people scattered around the WEST side, a couple of FF's were in the playground with a jet trying to keep back the flames. At some point I did see a FF dealing with the FSG calls who was collating all the information. He had bits of paper which were all laid out outside before you went through the tunnel. I wasn't passed any FSG calls as we were originally an emergency crew and the crews were struggling to get to the floors they were known to be.

Eventually they said we could walk through so we walked just to the point before the tunnel where you go underneath. We waited there for some time and were then told to walk underneath through the tunnel past the tower on my right where there were more BA wearers, SDBA and EDBA sitting there. We were on the WEST side by a wall lined up there, we were then called in one (1) by one (1) when indicated to go, there were a few FF there controlling when to go in, we went through under the police riot shields into the main lobby where there were a lot of crews waiting to go up, they were in snaked fashion around the lobby waiting to go in. I think we went through the side entrance not the main entrance, through a door way. I could hear discussions between some of the senior officers that there was no water as there was no pressure and they needed to come up with a plan to get pressure. I have no idea what the time was but I know day light was starting to appear. Once we were at the bottom there was a lot of water pouring down, I don't remember any sounds just because of the water. They pushed the EDBA wearers to one side and the SDBA wearers to another side and they were grabbing people as they came in. They grabbed FF LANG, FF MARKS, FF DUNCAN and FF KNAPMAN from my crew to be an emergency crew, as a time of whistles had gone off from Bethnal Green crew and comms had been lost with them.

I was split up from my crew so I joined a crew of four (4) from EDMONTON as an emergency crew. My original crew from Heston were then told to make their way up the stairs to find Bethnal Green and send them back to entry control and were also briefed to check on an obese casualty on the stairs. I think the

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casualty was blocking the way so they had to move him, I think he was already believed to be deceased but I am not sure.

BETHNAL GREEN did return to entry control so my crew were then tasked to make our way up to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor and to carry on searching from there. We were told to collect pieces of equipment on route. We started making our way up the stairs. I don't know any of the names of the EDMONTON crew although I think there were two (2) guys with the same name Andy and I think the EDMONTONS Crew MANAGER (CM) was CM CUTBILL [REDACTED] We were told that it was too hot and crews were struggling to proceed any further but to do what we could, there wasn't much pressure on water so we weren't able to fire fight.

We made our way up the stairs and that's when on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor we found the obese black male, I believed this person to be a male, who was apparently deceased. As you go up the stairs, he was half in the door to the flats and half on the stairs landing, his body was blocking the door and smoke was coming into the stairwell. I am presuming this person was a black male, he was wearing a jersey top and jogging bottoms. I remember navy blue and Maroon in colours but I can't remember which was the top or bottom, I don't think he had any shoes on, I would say he was about 20 stone in weight. We decided to move him so we could shut the door and stop the stairwell filling up with smoke. It took the whole crew to move him, he had tracksuit bottoms on so it wasn't easy to move him, and so we were having to drag him, grabbing anything to move to him onto the landing of the stairwell so we could shut the door. FF LANG, FF MARKS, FF KNAPMAN and FF DUNCAN had spoken to someone in my crew on the stairs on the way up and said they had tried to find signs of life.

We continued making our way up from the 10<sup>th</sup> floor and we passed an apparently deceased female, she was lying on mid-flight, on the landing between the two (2) floors, face down. Her head was facing up on the stairs and her legs were on the landing. I saw one of the guys trying to check for signs of life, I think he just shook her to see if there was any response, I don't know if they checked for any breathing or anything as I was at the back of them I couldn't see everything that was going on. I can recall this female wearing light clothing, white or blue, I can't remember anything else. We carried on past her and carried on to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor, the crews in front of us said the conditions were too hot so we went back down to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor and made our way through the door to the flats. It was thick black smoke and I couldn't see in front of me. We started going along the corridor, we were in a line following the left hand wall I think. I believe I was second or third from the front of the line. We had a Crew Manager (CM) in charge and he was right at the very back I think. We went through the door into the flat area, this door did look like a

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fire door but other than that I wouldn't know if it was self-closing. We made our way along past one flat and I noticed the flat door was open, it was quite dark in there but I could see a window with fire on the outside so there was an orange glow in there. I could tell the window had failed because of the breeze that was coming through. The flat itself wasn't on fire. The CM was saying the conditions were getting too hot and he wanted us to turn around and come back down. The crew did have a thermal image camera (TIC) which was passed around the crew. I did use the TIC myself and was using it when we entered the corridor on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor. When I did have the TIC I can't recall what the temperature was showing. This is when they said it was too hot, also, one of the FF's had a leak and was losing air but I am not sure who that was, so we started making our way back down to the mezzanine floor to where there is the glass barrier type thing. We dropped off the FF who was losing air and we decided we were going to go back up and we got to about the 7<sup>th</sup> floor and I think someone had done a gauge check, I think they thought we just wouldn't be able to carry on going up and do anything before we ran out of air so they decided to come back down. We made our way to Entry Control where they checked that we were alright and the CM passed on the information of what we had done. We then made our way back out to the grassed area where I was met by my watch, the time now was between 0600 hours and 0700 hours because I think at this point I text my mum as she would have seen it on the television.

After a quick drink I changed my cylinder again and waited to go back in. We went back through again under the tunnel and back to the holding area where we were sat against a wall waiting to be detailed. We were then moved to an area on the WEST side and gradually we were sent back into the tower under the riot shields again. As we were wearing EDBA we were put into the lift lobby area where we were sat for quite some time just waiting to go up. It was now getting quite smoky and the water was the level of our boots so they sent us back out to the main lobby area where we were waiting, I don't know for how long but it felt a while. They were pulling crews in and we were waiting to go in when they told us we were being relieved so we made our way back out and went to the leisure centre where I met my watch, we had some refreshments and then we made our way back to our appliance which had been moved slightly and parked to one side on the kerb so they could get traffic through because I had parked it in the middle of the road.

We then made our way to PADDINGTON Fire Station for our statements, parking on the A40, on the main road, around that way. At PADDINGTON we were met by some of the senior officers who explained the procedure and what was happening, we had some refreshments and were given fresh t-shirts if we wanted to put them on. We sat down for a while and they started writing questions we needed for

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our statements so we could start writing them. We went upstairs and spoke to a counsellor, she took our details and we spoke to her with just the people on my machine that night and then we came back to HESTON. I did get a call from the counsellor and I had an individual meeting as well.

Whilst in the building and travelling up the stairs the stairwell was well lit so I could see what was in front of me quite easily, it wasn't heavily smoke logged. The only place where you couldn't see anything because of the black smoke was on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor in the corridor to the flats, you couldn't see in front of you. So prior to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor the conditions were good, visibility was good, it was just a case of stepping over bits of equipment or hose that might have been in our way. I was surprised that there was only one stairwell and the width of it which was only about a meter to a meter and a half width. We did pass a crew on the stairs and that was quite difficult to pass each other. There was hose going up and a lot of trip hazards. I was surprised to see how much equipment which had been dumped along the route, axes, I noticed a breathing apparatus mask, gloves, lots of firefighting clothing also. I wasn't aware of anyone using a fire lift during the time I was in the building. It was surprisingly smoke free at the time we made our way up, there wasn't much noise either. I believe there were a couple of senior officers on some of the landings wearing white helmets on the lower floors. Because I was at the back I was just following to be honest, I didn't actually know what floor we were on, there were no floor numbers written on the walls but it looked like FF's had been writing the numbers with their fingers in the soot on the walls. Whilst I was in the building I didn't open any doors or windows. I didn't hear any conversations about a smoke management system and I didn't see any sprinklers in the building. I don't know anything about the gas supply to the building or when and if it was switched off and I have had no previous experience of gas burning but normally it would be left to burn with a cordon in place.

A Command Unit will be mobilised when there are 4 appliances or more at an incident. This is where we would report to at an incident and we would hand in our nominal role boards. They will tell us what they want us to do, whether it's to wait in a holding area or to rig in BA. The command unit itself is a large lorry with Command Unit in bold writing on the sides.

Around the 27<sup>th</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2017 I was involved in a high rise drill at TWICKENHAM RUGBY STADIUM. Prior to the fire at GRENFELL TOWER I would have to have a look, I wouldn't be able to tell you. The training involves going through the high rise procedures, what you do on arrival, the equipment you would need to take up, setting up a bridgehead inside the building. Messages that you might have to send from the officer in charge, also where you plug in the jets and what floors you plug into the dry riser. I haven't had any previous realistic training in a high rise block of flats before

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GRENFELL but we have been to a high rise around HESTON where we have plugged in and carried out a dry run so it's a step by step run through rather than a fast paced drill. The only time we broke procedure was when the FF was leaking air and we took him down and we went back up splitting the crew which breaks procedures.

The brigade does have a stay put policy and it's linked with the Fire Survivor Guidance calls (FSG). If a person can't get out of a flat whether it is smoke logged or in flames, control staff will stay on the phone to them at all times, they will gather information, that information will be relayed to the ground. We have an extra Command Unit (CU) that solely deals with FSG calls so they will be communicating with Entry Control, what flat number it is, how many people, where they might be in the flat and that will be given to the crews to go and investigate.

Entry control at this incident was on the ground floor in the basement. I think on the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> floor we lost radio comms but we were briefed that we would lose comms and to keep a check on our body guards and air supply and to get down before our whistles went off. The radio channel we were on was channel one (1), there was a lot of radio traffic with trying to get crews to certain areas etc. I would just like to add about the lack of toilets considering we were there for so long. This isn't directed specifically to the ladies, but it is harder for the ladies. I do feel we were sat around too much, we were EDBA wearers and I feel if we were sent in earlier we could have done a lot more. I didn't receive any injuries that night and I didn't witness any other fire fighter being injured. I don't think any of us have experienced a fire like that and a lot of FF went above and beyond any training.

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