

Witness Name: GARY WEBSTER

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INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

EXHIBIT WITN1723005



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HIV HORROR This man was one of 89 pupils from the SAME school infected with HIV and Hepatitis C by blood samples from US addicts and prostitutes... and only 17 are still alive today

Dad-of-one Gary Webster, 52, was diagnosed at the age of 17 after being infected by contaminated blood at his Hampshire school

EXCLUSIVE

By Josie Griffiths

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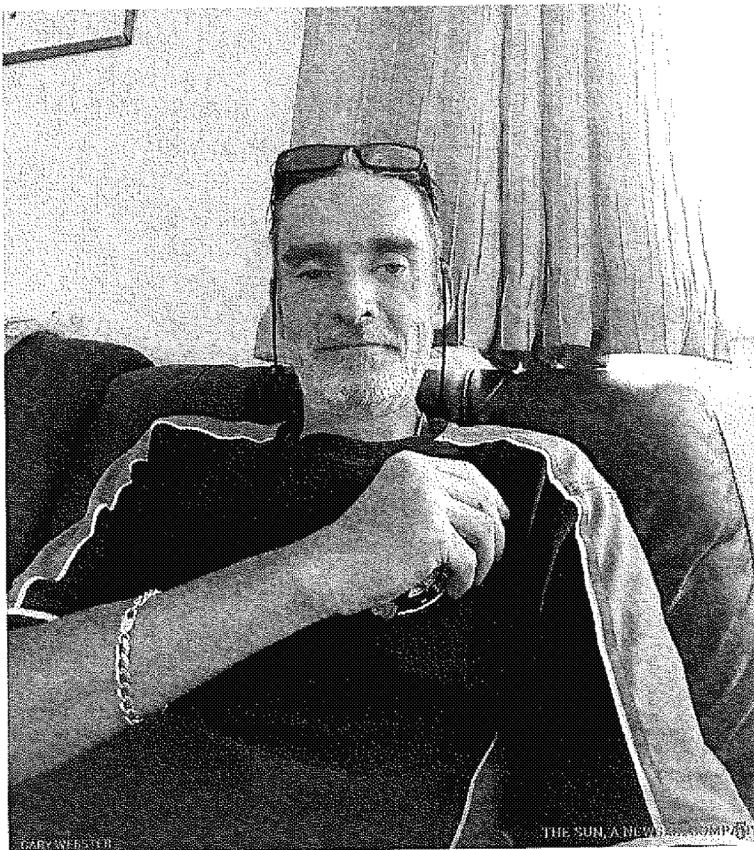


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COMMENTS

WHEN he was 17 years old, Gary Webster was given the devastating news that he had HIV/AIDS – and could have just six months to live.

It was 1983, and the teenager was getting his test results from a doctor at Treloar's College in Hampshire – a specialist boarding school for children with disabilities. Many of them, like Gary, were haemophiliacs.



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He was one of 89 children from the same school who were infected with HIV and Hepatitis C from contaminated blood samples, bought from high-risk patients including prostitutes, addicts and prisoners, in what has been described as the biggest scandal in NHS history.

Two years later, in 1985, the first of Gary's school friends had died. His best friend, **GRO-A**, passed away in the early 90s. Today, just 17 of the original 89 are still alive.

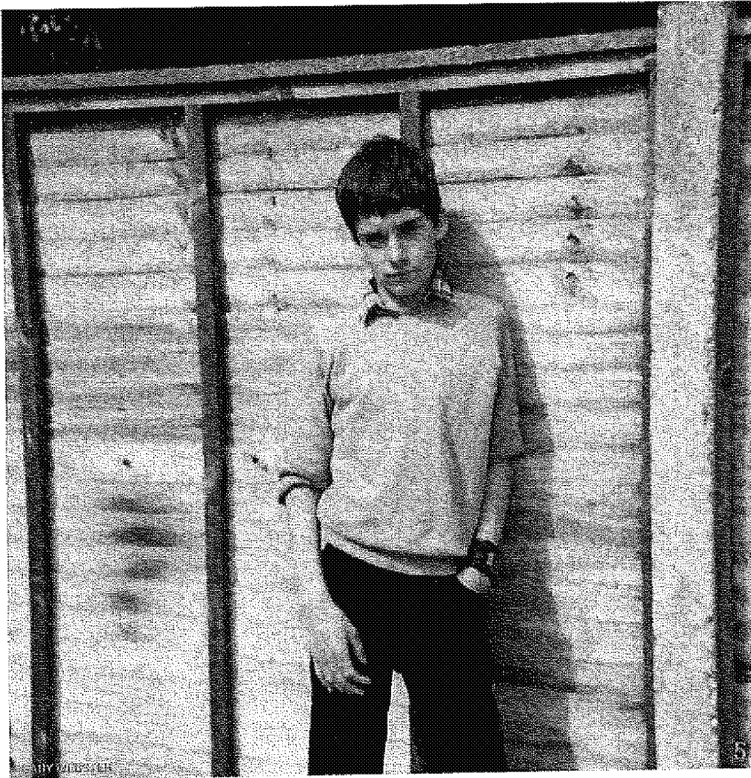
Now 52, Gary, from **GRO-C** Hampshire, admits he can no longer face going to the funerals of his classmates, and struggles daily with the fatigue and liver pains brought on by his illnesses.

He is still haunted by the day he was given his diagnosis - four years before the existence of anti-viral drugs.

The dad-of-one said: "It was awful because at the time they were saying 'AIDS is a death sentence'.

"The doctor sat there and said 'well we think you've been infected with a virus. There's no real test for it.

"It's terminal and we're not sure how long you're going to live. We can't guarantee anything longer than six months'.



Gary was 17 when he was diagnosed, and was given just six months to live (pictured: aged 11)

"At 17 years old that was pretty major. Then they're saying 'we're not sure how it's passed on. It could be passed on by touch, by kissing'. At 17 you have girlfriends. It's a nightmare.

"They didn't tell my parents, I had to tell them."

Gary was nine years old when his parents decided to send him to Treloar's.

He said: "I went to normal school like everyone else before, but I was missing so much school due to haemophilia and bleeding into my joints.

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"I was bullied a bit but nothing major. But I couldn't do things other kids do, because if I did and I hurt myself I would bleed."

The pioneering boarding school, in a stately home, was a place where disabled children could feel happy, safe and normal.

It had a swimming pool, a snooker room and an archery field – and, in a recent Panorama programme, some pupils compared the college to Harry Potter's Hogwarts.

Gary said: "We had a great time there, it was a brilliant school. The nurses, the care staff, the doctors all did a brilliant job.

"We do not blame them at all as many of us believe that their hands were forced. They were told to experiment on us.

"It was nice to meet other people who have haemophilia and they can understand what you're going through."

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In his final year at Treloar's, Gary received the life-changing news he had HIV/AIDS – caused by infected blood transfusions which have since killed 2,400 people.

The first HIV-related deaths only happened in 1980; the term AIDS was coined two years later; anti-viral drugs did not exist until 1987. The year 1983 was a very scary time to receive such a diagnosis.

Speaking of the stigma at the time, Gary said: "I lost friends over it, because everyone thought HIV was from homosexuality and drugs and all that. And you're all put in the same boat, so that's what we were.

"It was hard, especially if you're going to meet a new person, what do you say?

"I have a daughter and luckily she's clear. It's been hard. I'm single. I don't think it has helped relationships.

"But I've kept friends for years and years that understand it. But I lost a few friends, but there you go."

What is haemophilia?

HAEMOPHILIA is a rare genetic disorder which causes bruising and excessive bleeding from cuts because the body lacks the protein which helps blood to clot.

It mainly affects men although women can carry the affected gene.

Six thousand people in the UK suffer from the condition.

There is no cure but it can be treated to prevent prolonged bleeding.

These days the genetically engineered clotting medicines given to patients are safe.

Around 4,670 British haemophiliacs were infected with Hepatitis C – and a further 1,243 co-infected with HIV – during the contaminated blood scandals in the 70s and 80s.

The viruses came from contaminated clotting factor products sourced from high-risk patients in the USA and other countries.

At school, Gary was being given blood transfusions once or twice a week.

Three years on from his HIV diagnosis, in 1986, Gary was told that he also had Hepatitis C. At the time, he was working as a tailor for Moss Bros.

Gary then got a job as a volunteer adviser with the British Red Cross – looking after 5,000 volunteers in Hampshire, Surrey and the Isle of Wight.

He loved working, but was forced to quit his job in 2008 – due to his daily battle with both viruses.

Gary says HIV has ruined his life - and claims pupils at his school were 'experimented on'
GARY WEBSTER

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Gary says HIV has ruined his life - and claims pupils at his school were 'experimented on'

Gary said: "HIV and Hep C are both different viruses. So if one doesn't get you the other one does.

"I could live with the haemophilia. If I bleed I have an injection of factor VIII and it gets better, and then after a few days I can walk again. But the viruses have destroyed my life.

"I worked for 20 years but about nine years ago I just couldn't do it anymore. HIV and Hep C stopped me working. You're just tired all the time and fatigued.

"This is nothing to do with haemophilia, this is HIV and Hep C. You don't want to do anything, you're depressed. It's horrible. Some days I can't get out of bed.

"I have about two hours a day where I can actually feel normal. Other than that I just sit on the settee and don't do a lot.

"You get liver pains, especially with the Hep C.

"Then you catch every virus going. So if someone's got a cold, you get ill with that. Or pneumonia, I've had that a number of times and a lot of stomach problems."

Gary (pictured, age five) grew up with haemophilia - and was being given blood transfusions twice a week
GARY WEBSTER

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Gary (pictured, age five) grew up with haemophilia - and was being given blood transfusions twice a week

Five years ago, when Gary started treatment for Hepatitis C, he thought the gruelling drugs were going to kill him.

He said: "When I first went on the Hep C treatment I was really bad. I had to go into hospital and it nearly did me in.

"My parents were really worried. But the treatment for Hep C is meant to have improved and I'm just waiting to go on the new treatment.

"Hep C destroys your liver. And now anyone that's still alive is really getting problems."

Gary has tried to maintain a relationship with the small number of Treloar's College pupils who are still alive.

He added: "I'm still in contact with a few, because there's not many.

"I went to the college with about 100 haemophiliacs. I think out of that 72 have now died.

"There's a couple in my area that I meet up with, or we all meet up in London. But there's less and less of us. It's really bad.

"It's horrible (seeing others pass away) because you always think, being selfish, God I'll be there one day.

"They've got exactly the same as you have, and you go to so many funerals.

"It's not only your friends but their families, because at boarding school you get to know their parents. So it's a nightmare.

"I don't go to reunions or funerals now as it is too upsetting."

He was a pupil at Treloar's College - a pioneering boarding school for disabled children

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He was a pupil at Treloar's College, a pioneering boarding school for disabled children

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Theresa May announced a public inquiry into the scandal.

Gary said: "I'm pleased there is going to be an inquiry but I think that it should be a full statutory inquiry where people are compelled to go there under oath and tell the truth.

"I think the Department of Health should not be involved in the running of any inquiry, as they themselves are seriously implicated.

"There's been so many cover ups over the years.

"This has been going on for 30, 35 years now. So many children have been got rid of.

"The government knew this could happen, and it did happen. So I just hope the inquiry does the right thing."

Sadly, 30 years on, any justice will come too late for thousands of victims.

Gary said: "It's too late for 72 people I went to school with. It's not about damages or compensation, I'm not interested in that.

"It's about finding out the truth. I do feel angry but I've lived with it and I've coped with it to a certain degree.

"I'm lucky that I'm one of those people that can accept it. A lot of people haven't. They're angry, and I'm angry but everyone deals with it in different ways."

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