

Witness Name: Isabel Epstein

Statement No: W5659001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated:

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ISABEL EPSTEIN**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 11 March 2021.

I, Isabel Epstein, will say as follows: -

#### **Section 1. Introduction**

1. My name is Isabel Epstein and my date of birth is GRO-C 1942. I live in London and my address is known to the Inquiry.
2. I am retired now but I used to be the account executive at KPMG. Before that, I was a Marketing Director at a film and TV company, a director at Brands Hatch Motor Racing Circuit, and I used to work at Kelly Girl. Before that I worked in theatre, I was an actress. The most famous thing I was in was *Captain Nemo and the Underwater City*.
3. My husband Jacob, always known as Jackie, passed away in 2007. We were both remarried, his two sons and my two daughters consider themselves siblings. I



intend to speak about Jackie, and his experience with Hepatitis C. In particular, the nature of his illness, how he was infected, how the illness affected him and our family, the treatment he received and the impact it had on him and our lives together.

## **Section 2. How Infected**

4. Jackie was born on GRO-C 1934. He was a motor racing driver. He drove everything up to Formula 1. He was a very active man. He was tacit and stoic. If he was ill, or had a cold, or in pain, you would never know it.
5. Jackie's father was Sir Jacob Epstein, the sculptor. Jackie would say they were poor but they always had gardener and a chef. Jackie was a strange child as I understand. He was introduced to the Art world through Saturday soirees where talented people from all walks of life came. His dad would ask him to make a painting and he would knock it up the night before. His dad thought he was spending all week doing it.
6. Jackie was very talented at art, but because his father was already doing that, he wouldn't do it. He wanted to be the best at what he was doing.
7. He went to aeronautical college and was an engineer on aircraft.
8. At aeronautical college, three of his friends started a racing club. They would go up and down Bayswater Road. His interest in motor racing developed through that.
9. His stoical nature was probably built up through his motor racing. Accidents happened, and it was in the days before fireproof clothing. When he raced in the *Mille Miglia*, he got severely burnt and part of his side was removed. But he discharged himself to go for the next race in Tokyo. Luckily he passed out at the airport and couldn't continue on his journey.



10. We got married on 23 April 1986 having lived together for 5 years before that. Our life was eclectic; we would go from a motor racing event one day, to an art event the next.
11. We did have the honour of meeting the Queen and Prince Philip once. Jacob's widow, Kathleen Garman, (not Jackie's mum) together with her close friend, Sally Ryan, had donated a huge collection of works to the New Art Gallery in Walsall which was opened by the Queen. We were invited to the Opening Ceremony and had to stand next to one of the Epstein bronzes, a dog called Frisky who belonged to Jackie but which was exhibited as a dog owned by his Father. The Queen said, "It must be very galling to know Frisky was your dog but people think he was your Father's dog." We were amazed that she knew that. Also she slightly turned, so that the cameras behind us couldn't lip read. We were so taken by that. She was amazing.
12. I had been at work that day when Jackie rang me and said, "Do you want to meet the queen, I'm not sure?" I said, "You stupid man!" He was very easy-going. He took everything in his stride. He said, "If you want to go, we will go. If you don't, we won't."
13. He was so funny. At parties, or whenever we had a family gathering, which was quite often, Jackie had a measurement of how the party was going. Using his fingers to demonstrate he would say, "Decorum is dropping..."
14. He became a Director at Brands Hatch Motor Racing Circuit. I joined him and became a Director there too.
15. In 1991, he had to have sinus surgery. It was a perfectly normal operation, nothing unusual. He was in relatively good health up until then. There was nothing he needed to go to the doctor's about.



16. He went in to have the operation at Nuffield Hospital, Tunbridge Wells (a private hospital) on 7 October 1991. During the operation, Jackie haemorrhaged and needed a blood transfusion. I was rung up to say that they had to give it to him.
17. I believe it was something to do with the platelets. He got either red or white, I'm not sure which. I'm a bit like Jackie - if it's not broken don't fix it. I don't read side effects on medication because I'll get them! My children would say we're dumb like that...
18. There weren't any warnings about the risks of getting a blood transfusion. It had to be done straight away. And nothing was said to me afterwards about there being any potential problems.
19. After the operation, things started to change. Gradually over time, Jackie lost a tremendous amount of weight. He aged incredibly quickly. He was very tired and he bruised easily. He got infected cuts and was taken to the hospital twice with cellulitis.
20. He became unable to deal with stress, unable to cope with things. It was such a change from his easy-going and stoic self.
21. He would get very cold. His temperature got so low. We eventually bought a place in southern Spain in 2002. We decided he would go live there. I had to work for another 6 months and then I would go too. He came back to the UK for periods of time. We were renovating the house in Spain, so he couldn't always be there.
22. Up until 2004, Jackie wasn't aware that he was Hepatitis C positive. That must have been when he came to see the GP, and I was told to get tested. That was probably at the Albion Street Clinic in Canada Water, London.
23. I can't remember anything about how Jackie was told about the Hepatitis C. I remember being very upset because there was such a social stigma about it.



24. GRO-C

25. Other than the sinus surgery, Jackie had no other transfusions - none that I am aware of.

26. He had had a diagnosis of lupus before this. He didn't have any tattoos or piercings, and he never took intravenous drugs.

27. When he had the accident at the *Mille Miglia* in Greece, he went to a cottage hospital and I know the conditions were quite bad. I wasn't there, so I can't be absolutely certain that there was no transfusion then. But as far as I know, the transfusion at Nuffield Hospital was the only one he ever had.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

28. I actually thought it was Hepatitis B that he got. I remember being told we shouldn't use the same towels, so I thought that it was Hepatitis B, as it was not just blood to blood contact.

29. When I got tested in 2004, I got tested for Hepatitis C. But I had thought it was Hepatitis B so somebody must have mentioned it to me at some point. I don't know to be honest.

### **Section 4. Consent**

30. I don't think Jackie was ever tested on without consent. Although he had a stoical character, I went with him to doctor's appointments whenever things had to be done, and I am not aware of anything like that at all. He wasn't involved in any research either.



## **Section 5. Impact**

### **Physical and Mental Impact of Hepatitis C**

31. Soon after the operation, Jackie developed this issue with constantly getting cold. I was still working and he was doing odd projects. He would get very tired and he bruised easily. He developed cellulitis on at least two occasions.
32. He started losing weight probably around 1993 or 1994. It wasn't a dramatic change, it was gradual. It probably happened over about 10 years.
33. He used to be quite a chubby person. By the time I met him he had lost some weight anyway, but that was deliberate. He lost about 2 stone during the time I knew him. He got very sallow in the face. It was just a gradual thing. Then he developed difficulties with eating, he couldn't swallow. He had to have all his food pureed.
34. He aged prematurely. When he was 69, he looked like he was in his early 80's. His body aged. That affected his ability to do things; to walk properly, and his stability for example.
35. One particular night visiting his son at his place, we were staying in a hotel nearby. We were walking back to the hotel and it was awful. It was a bumpy uneven road and Jackie was freezing. It wasn't a difficult walk for the rest of us but trying to get him back to the hotel was a nightmare. He didn't recover from that for ages.
36. On another occasion, Jackie and I went on an around the world trip. My cousin Malcolm was with us. Why it sticks out in memory so much is that we went to Vietnam, which is quite a warm country, but Jackie could not get warm. In the hotel there were heaters on the wall, but they wouldn't work. We told the hotel people we were going to have to find a new hotel. Jackie had blankets draped over him.



37. GRO-C
- GRO-C Jackie and I carried on and went to New Zealand, but Jackie couldn't cope anymore. He was getting very tired and cold. He had been a great traveller before.
38. We came back home and Jackie went to live in Spain where it was warmer. I was going over on weekends but I had to keep working. I had to support us, we had no other income coming in at that stage.
39. In terms of the emotional impact, Jackie would never go for any sort of therapy, he wouldn't do it. But he was very moody for the last 10 years of his life, which was so unlike his old self.
40. He was not a man to voice his emotions. He was not romantic, but he would *do* romantic things. He'd say, "You've always said you've wanted to go to Hong Kong, so I thought we could go next week."
41. He would forget my birthday and I would say, "Why haven't you got me a card?" and he would say, "Well how do you know today is your real birthday?" Then the following week he would fill the place with balloons! He decided that was when we should celebrate it, not when convention said we should. He was funny. He was my soulmate but at times I really disliked him!
42. In 2007 he broke his hip. That was the only time he was under a Spanish hospital. I went over to Spain and brought him over to the UK. Jackie was taken to hospital and they wouldn't let him come back to the house. That was when I was living with my cousin in GRO-C It was a modern, four-story town house. Jackie couldn't walk even though he had had the hip replacement. He also couldn't swallow properly by then, he had to have all his food pureed.
43. GRO-C
- GRO-C A room became available there, and I moved Jackie to that room. I moved in with him and slept on



floor for over 12 months. We lived there. He was going in and out of hospital for various things.

44. Jackie passed away on 7 January 2009. His death certificate said the cause of death was pneumonia and cirrhotic liver disease.

#### **Impact on Family Members**

45. When Jackie's two sons and my two daughters met, all four of them made the decision that they were going to be a family. I became close with his first wife, much to Jackie's disgust. My daughters lived with us for some time, and one of his sons did too when he went through the break-up of his marriage.

46. I spoke to my daughter about all this recently and we remembered that Jackie would get mood swings. That was very strange as he had really changed. Before the Hepatitis C, he had always presented one persona; he didn't get angry or anything like that. He took everything as it came along. He was soft and gentle. In fact, he was described as a gentleman and a gentle person. But about 10 years before he died, he started to get angry about things. That was so unlike him, and not very pleasant at all. He couldn't handle stress. We would keep things from him if we thought they were going to upset him.

47. At one point, circa 2004, my job took me to the North of England for 2 years and I was working up in Saddleworth. Jackie and my daughters were living at our place in [GRO-C]. He got a scratch on his hand and it developed into cellulitis. His hand swelled up and they took him to hospital. That was a nightmare for the girls, getting him there and keeping him there. He never wanted to go to the doctor's. It turned out to be a very close call. The infection was moving up his arm and towards his heart.



48. Jackie also had walking difficulties. Later on in life he had to use a wheelchair, but he did fracture his hip. He should have used a walking stick or something but he wouldn't. He was proud and he didn't want to.
49. The main thing was that he got very, very cold. We were always worrying that he needed to be hospitalised.
50. We spent my youngest daughter's 40th birthday on a boat, and we got Jackie there in a wheelchair. He hated every minute of that. But that's what we are like as a family. We got him there but he wasn't well. We looked at the photos recently and he looks appalling. The broken hip caused him to be in a wheelchair, but it did not cause him to be that unwell.
51. Towards the end, when I was living on the floor as his carer at his care home, my daughter had a fear that he wouldn't make it through the night. We all did. She says she would touch the bedside table before bed and say, "Not tonight."
52. Each time it got a bit touch and go. He rallied a number of times. Even once when we were told that was it, he rallied. He was a bit of a 9 lives kind of person.
53. My daughters were with me in the hospital when he died and, in keeping with our arrangement, I said to the doctors, "You can use any of his organs." The doctors looked at each other and said, "I don't think so..." That made us laugh because we thought that he's led such a full life that he'd completely used up his body...

#### **Financial Impact**

54. Workwise, the Hepatitis C did curtail what Jackie could do. He started a few other projects, badly I must say. It surprised me. He used to be so organised but this was different, and money was put into it.



55. When I divorced from my first husband, I got a sum of money. I put it into Jackie's business and let him take care of it. I let him manage our money and that ended up being a huge mistake because he got dreadful with money towards the end.

56. He needed some money for starting this particular project. We ended up losing money on it. He said, "You don't love me enough to back me." It was awful to hear and so unlike Jackie to make that comment. It was so indicative of him changing as a person.

57. Jackie couldn't get around. I needed to get a buggy and I couldn't afford it. Thankfully the British Racing Drivers Club (BRDC) bought him a buggy. Brian Jones told them about his need.

58. As I have mentioned, when Jackie moved to Spain to try to keep warm, I had to keep working as that was our only income. It took a real toll on our marriage. I was always in the wrong place at the wrong time. I was in the UK when I was meant to be in Spain, and vice versa.

59. When we bought the house in Spain, I moved in with my cousin to save money. We had a house in GRO-C before that, but we had to sell it to buy the place in Spain.

### Stigma

60. We did tell family about the Hepatitis C, but we didn't tell friends. We did the usual thing of, "There's nothing we can do about it, just be careful, and go on as usual."

61. We just ignored it and carried on. We are that kind of people. If we went to a hotel and got an uncomfortable bed, we wouldn't complain about it. Not because we couldn't stand up for our rights, but because it wasn't important, it was done.

62. I don't think Jackie would have thought about it. It was just a fact, a way of life.



#### **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

63. In 2004 Jackie was told that he was infected. He wasn't given an explanation, not that I can recall.

64. Jackie was not offered any treatment for the Hepatitis C at all. He didn't have any biopsies and he wasn't given medication. To be fair, he went to Spain in 2002, but he would come home for appointments.

65. All I can recall is that I was told not to use the same towels. I have no recollection of anything else. It must have been my GP who did my test. It was negative.

66. There was this terrible stigma about Hepatitis C.

#### **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

67. I found out about the Skipton Fund. I heard about some class action that was being taken and somehow I must have found the information.

68. I remember ringing the Nuffield Hospital trying to find records and they said they couldn't help me. I couldn't get anything out of them. I think they said they only kept records for 7 years.

69. I did the Skipton application and they rejected us. I remember they said the application was "out of time" but I was not told by how much.

#### **Section 8. Other Issues**

70. I think as far as I'm concerned, I'm very sad about the effect that Jackie's illness had on our relationship. It had been absolutely brilliant, we had a very exciting life. He was my rock, absolutely my rock and my soulmate.



71. He became more and more frustrated about the things he couldn't do the way he used to. It makes me sad that this happened to him.

72. People always tend to eulogise people when they die. He stopped caring about all of that. I remember the last year when we were at the care home, people came to visit him, motor racing stars like Damon Hill and Jackie Stewart. Jackie said, "I don't know why they bother coming." He didn't know himself what a terrific person he had been, and what an influential person he had been in motor racing. He didn't care by the end. He didn't care about his life anymore.

73. Jackie and I had pulled together the Association of Racing Driving School (ARDS). We went around all the racing schools in the country and set up a program. It was the main program for learning about motor racing. It's still going to this day but I'm sure there have been updates to it.

74. Towards the end, long before Jackie got to that final stage, he lost all his curiosity for the world. He was a very curious person and very very very funny. It wasted the last years of our marriage. If it was because of infected blood, it makes me angry.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

16 July 2021