

Witness Name: Anna Maria Preston

Statement No: WITN1477001

Exhibits: WITN1477002

Dated: July 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ANNA MARIA PRESTON

I, Anna Maria Preston will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Anna Maria Preston and I was born on GRO-C 1947. I live at GRO-C. I am a widow and am retired.
2. I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rule 2006 and understand that my son Brandon Preston also intends to provide a witness statement to the inquiry.
3. I am providing this statement without access to my late husband's medical records and have been advised by both Singleton Hospital Swansea and Queen Mary's Hospital Roehampton, that they have been destroyed, although I have a death certificate exhibit certificate WITN1477002 that shows that Hepatitis C was given to my husband in a blood transfusion.

Section 2. How Affected

4. I am providing this statement on behalf of my late husband, Ralph Alistair Preston, who was known as Alan. Alan was in the British Parachute

Regiment which was known as "Red Beret". He particularly enjoyed rugby and boxing and played both sports when he was younger. We met in 1977 and were married in 1979. Our only son, Brandon, was born on **GRO-C** 1980. A few years into our marriage, we moved to Majorca and ran a tapas bar, "Taffy's Bar" it was called. We spent 3 years and loved it there; however Alan became unwell and developed boils. He went to a local hospital for what was meant to be a simple presage, we discovered later that they had chipped part of his liver off and it became lodged in a vein in his left leg. This limited the amount of blood flow to his body and he became very pale and looked very unwell, so after seeing a local doctor who was of no help, I suggested he fly to the UK and visit his own doctor there, as by now his toes had started to turn black. This was around the 1980's where, after seeing his doctor in **GRO-C** he was immediately admitted to Singleton Hospital Swansea, whilst in Singleton Hospital. Alan had six operations and a few blood transfusions; they were trying to stop the gangrene setting in so they were cutting off bits of his leg. They eventually amputated his toes, then his foot, just below the ankle.

5. On one occasion, they injected a needle into his spine for an epidural and it snapped in his spine. He was told that in the attempt to get it out, if anything went wrong there would be a risk of him being paralysed. My Alan had spent 11 months in Singleton hospital.
6. When Singleton Hospital could do no more for my Alan, they sent him to Queen Mary's Hospital Roehampton, South West London, for a below the knee amputation of his left leg. I remember this was around the time of the Harrods Bomb which was on 17th December 1983. I remember him having to have a blood transfusion at the time. Alan was an inpatient for about 3 months in total at Queen Mary's Hospital.
7. These operations that he had in both Singleton hospital and Queen Mary's hospital, required multiple blood transfusions over these periods. I was with Alan during most of his operations and I can confirm my Alan was not told of any risks from using the blood.

8. While my Alan was at Queen Mary's Hospital, he spoke to the medical staff and was told by the doctors at the time that they were importing blood from America due to the Harrods bombing, which caused a sudden shortage of blood with such a rush of people in hospital. I was also told that the NHS imported about 1,000 pints of blood which had to be used on the day and that they knew it was contaminated.
9. My Alan came home and it took him a long time to adjust to home life after spending so many months in hospital. He then started to develop all sort of illnesses, and seemed to be losing a bit of weight. His doctor decided to send him for a scan and that is when they discovered he had Hepatitis C. This was in or around August 1995. The GP said that my Alan got his infection from a blood transfusion and told him he had 2 years to live as it was in incurable disease. I was furious that the doctor imposed a time limit like this on him and I believe that the doctor should have given Alan hope by suggesting that just maybe there was a cure, as we are discovering cures every day. My Alan's face looked totally destroyed; it told it all. I returned to the doctor's office leaving Alan in the car. I told him I would make sure my Alan lived longer than 2 years and that he should have been more compassionate with my Alan. I swore that I would never go back to that surgery or doctor again and I explained to him, "my Alan did ask you when he was going to die, but you should have been more gentle and compassionate".
10. When we got home my Alan just sat in his chair and had given up, as if he was now waiting to die. The doctor had destroyed Alan by telling him he would die in 2 years; my Alan was a ruined man. My Alan was always a fighting to stay healthy, but when he was told that he had been infected with Hepatitis C and had 2 years to live, that was when he just gave up, he would keep saying to me, "I am going to die, I am going to die", every day. I would try and convince him that everything would be okay and that he would be fine, but he was just worried that he was leaving me on my own with a young child to bring up and worried about the finances. We did everything together as a

family, and then all of a sudden he was sat at home waiting to die; he became depressed.

11. The doctor never said much about Hepatitis C other than that it was incurable and he would only have 2 years to live. No information was provided in regard to managing the infection. Nonetheless I decide to protect my son as I was worried anyway. I did not let Brandon use the same utensils as Alan, gave him separate towels everything. I was worried and did not know what else to do. My Alan did not know what I was doing, I did not use separate things from my Alan as I did not want his to be aware of any changes in the house. As I always did, I shared everything with my Alan. After my Alan passed, I had Brandon and I tested for Hepatitis C as I did not know how it was spread and was very worried, but neither Brandon nor I were infected.

Section 3. Other Infections

12. I am not aware of my husband having any other infections.

Section 4. Consent

13. My husband did not know that he was being given infected blood and he did not consent to it. He only gave consent for his operations. He was therefore not given any information about any risks of being given infected blood.

14. However, I know that he was in hospital for around 14 months in total and I do wonder why he was kept in hospital for so long. He became institutionalised and when he came out he would want his meals only at specific times, as this was what he had become used to whilst in hospital.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

15. Hepatitis C had a big impact on my Alan. Over the last 5 years of his life, my Alan's body was breaking down. From being a fit man, he became asthmatic, diabetic, regularly had bronchitis and colds and was in and out of Heath

Hospital, which is now known as The University Hospital of Wales. It seems that every time I went to visit him he had developed another illness. It was because of these health issues that his doctor decided to perform a scan which was when they discovered he had Hepatitis C initially.

16. Alan was very angry as he was a proud man and was always fit. He refused to sleep downstairs; he said it did not feel right, so every night he would struggle to climb the stairs to bed. We would have to call an ambulance every other night just to help him up the stairs. It eventually became a regular occurrence every night. My son and I had to watch him go from a 20 stone healthy man to a 7 stone weak man; it was soul destroying to say the least. I was at home trying to keep him alive; he was so depressed and would just want to sit in his chair all day waiting to die. We did not have any visitors, as people were not sure about Hepatitis C, but my son was my main supporter. Unfortunately it had lasting effects to his mental and physical wellbeing. As a young teenager it really affected my son and it was horrible to watch my son suffering too. He became a mess; suicidal and took to comfort eating and ballooned to over 25 stone. He was seeing a psychiatrist for severe depression and still is; at the time I became fearful that I could lose my son. We suffered a lot of from the stigma surrounding Hepatitis C at the time, even from people we thought were close to us. My mother refused to come and visit us at our home once I had told her of my Alan's infection. She was worried about catching something she would say. Some of our friends stopped coming round and just did not bother with us anymore; I was basically left alone except for 2 friends who still bothered with me. It is only now I have realised how people stopped visiting me, as I was too busy with my Alan and at the time I never really noticed. I was a lot more isolated than I realised, even my two brothers stopped coming to my home to see me. I would meet up with them for coffee at a nearby café, on my own, and in a way it worked for me as it was an escape for a brief time.

17. Before he became ill, my Alan ran an electrical business in Cardiff called "Domestics of Cardiff", where he sold and repaired white goods e.g. washing machines, fridges and freezers. His main customers were landlords. He was

teaching Brandon from the age of 12/13 about the business and was training him to take over the business eventually. Brandon would go out with him on repairs and Brandon would get involved and ask his dad questions. He loved his dad and being with him, they had a beautiful bond and it was wonderful to watch them together; he misses his dad so much. They would go to watch rugby together and do so many things that father and son enjoyed.

18. When my Alan was unable to continue to work. I took over the running of the shop while he stayed at home, but after his death I had to close our shop as I could not deal with people coming in and making comments or wishes. Alan was very popular, but this was a constant reminder. I felt that there was no one for me when I needed them, so I did not want to hear their fake words now. I only had 2 friends the stuck by me the whole time. Suddenly from having quite a comfortable lifestyle, I ended up having to bring up my son on my own, who was now very severely depressed and suicidal, and going to booties and markets selling what I had to just to try to get by. I was not just grieving for my Alan; I had to watch the pain my son was suffering and have a fear that I was also losing my son too, for something that should not have happened.

19. I am a pensioner and only receive a pension of £147.00 per week. I add to my pension by selling things at booties and on eBay that my friends give me in order to survive. I recently had to deal with a bailiff; my friends lent me the money and I am paying back a little every month. I have debts and any payment would be good for me. It is getting harder now that I am older and a pensioner.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

20. My husband never received any treatment for his infection, nor did he receive any care, support or counselling. I believe that they both would have benefitted him.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

21. My Alan never received any payments from any funds or trusts while he was alive, and he was on a special diet which was expensive. My son and I had to go without, for me to be able to find the money to provide Alan with these meals.
22. I believe I heard about the Skipton Fund from a solicitor in Scotland who phoned me to tell me about the contaminated blood scandal. This is how it all started for me many years ago. She phoned me and said that she believed that my husband was given contaminated blood.
23. I then applied for the money, filled in some forms sent my Alan's Death Certificate to them. I then received the money about a month later. I used the money to clear my debts that had accumulated since my Alan's death.
24. I was given a lump sum payment from the Skipton Fund of £20,000 in around 2012/2013. I later received a further £50,000. This helped me to pay some of the debt I had accumulated.
25. The Caxton Foundation became The Velindre Trust and they paid me around £30,000 about 2 years ago; they were very sympathetic.

Section 8. Other Issues

26. None of this should have happened. They condemned my Alan to death; they knew what they were doing. I know there may have been a shortage of blood and I understand that, but they should have had it screened, they knew it had come from America where blood is generally sold and most to people that are drug addicts.
27. I hate them for what they are responsible for and for what happened to my Alan. But for the parents who have lost children's can't imagine that, it was bad enough losing my Alan, we had such a special connection, I fell in love

with him the moment I meet him. I never wanted to get married prior to meeting him. We were so close. He was my soul mate.

28. My Alan's death certificate states 3 causes of death; hepatic encephalitis, cirrhosis of the liver, and the Hepatitis C infection following a blood transfusion of contaminated blood products and alcoholism. (He was not a drinker, this is a lie!). I am tee-total so I would not be living with an alcoholic, and would know if he was one. The only time he could drink would be at the local pub whilst I would play bingo for a few hours at the local bingo hall and then I picked him up, so I would have known if he had more than a couple of beers, as I would have been able to smell it on him. When he was too ill to go out, for the last 2 years once or twice a week I would bring him a couple of cans of beer, never more than that. The death certificate is definitely not true about him being an alcoholic.

29. Although compensation would be beneficial for me as I am a pensioner, it is not all about compensation. I want them to understand how we feel and understand the implication of what has happened to us all involved in this scandal. I want closure and the government to formally apologise for their actions and the damage that they have done to us on a physical and mental level.

Anonymity

30. NOT RELEVANT

31. I would like to give oral evidence to the Inquiry NOT RELEVANT
NOT RELEVANT

Statement of Truth

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

Signed..... **GRO-C**

Dated..... 13th July 2019