

Witness Name: R J Sparkes

Statement No: WITN3974001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: June 2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF RICHARD JOHN SPARKES

I, Richard John Sparkes, will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Richard John Sparkes and I was born on GRO-C 1984. I live at GRO-C Cardiff, GRO-C
2. I make this statement as an affected son of my late father, Leslie John Sparkes, who was born on GRO-C 1932 and passed away, aged only 58, on 24th March 1990.
3. My father was infected with HIV and Hepatitis C via contaminated Factor IX concentrates.
4. My mother, Susan Elaine Sparkes, and my brother, Alexander Anthony Sparkes, have provided witness statements to the Inquiry under witness numbers **WITN1713001** and **WITN3973001** respectively.
5. I refer to my mother's witness statement in relation to dates and factual information pertaining to my father as I was only aged 6 when he passed away. Furthermore, I was a particularly immature and "young" 6 year old due to my Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyspraxia and visual

impairment. When I was aged 10, I underwent some tests which showed that I had the immaturity of a 6 year old but the educational age of a 21 year old. Although I was Dyslexic, I was incredibly good at mathematics and spelling.

6. **This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to my father's full medical records.**

Section 2. How Affected

7. My father had moderate Haemophilia B, with a clotting factor of 3-5%, for which he was initially treated with Cryoprecipitate before being moved onto Factor IX concentrates.
8. He was treated at the University Hospital of Wales under the care of Professor Bloom. GRO-D
- GRO-D
9. I refer to my mother's witness statement in relation to further information regarding this section and, in particular, as to when and how she was told about my late father's HIV infection and the fact that only discovered after his death that he had also been infected with Hepatitis C.

Section 3. Other Infections

10. I refer to my mother's witness statement.

Section 4. Consent

11. I refer to my mother's witness statement.

Section 5. Impact

12. My memories of my father are relatively vague given that I was only aged 6 when he passed away and I refer to the contents of paragraph 5 above of my witness statement in this regard.
13. However, I do recall two things about my father which were firstly that I was not allowed anywhere near him if he had cut himself and secondly I was never allowed to jump up onto his back or anything like that. I found both of these difficult due to my young age and the fact that I was a particularly bouncy and hyper child.
14. Life as I knew it significantly changed after my father passed away. My mother was unable to cope; I don't think she could deal with her grief and my disabilities at the same time which led to my brother and me entering the care system. My brother fared better than me in this regard and I refer to the contents of his witness statement for further information.
15. My first care placement was particularly difficult; the foster mother was akin to Hyacinth Bucket and the foster father to Victor Meldrew. Following this, I ended up in a few different foster homes before being placed in a children's home. Looking back, I do think that the foster carers struggled to understand and manage my disabilities.
16. I remember being upset when my brother and I were split up and sent to different foster care homes. I also used to think that the reason I had been put in care was because I had done something really bad or wrong at home.
17. I was not aware of my father's death until about a year after he passed away. The news was broken to me by one of my foster carers. She told me in a very "*matter of fact*" manner and did not offer me any support or compassion. This made the whole situation doubly upsetting. In fact, it was not until I was aged 18 that Mary, who was the social worker assigned to me due to my visual impairment, furnished me with some basic information about my father's death.

18. When my brother reached the age of 16 he returned to our mother's home. However, when I hit the age of 16, my mother asked that I remain in foster care until I was aged 19, which was really upsetting at the time. However, she felt that she would be unable to cope with my disabilities if I was returned to her on a full time basis which would have been the case had the placement ended when I was aged 16. However, despite my mother's wishes, I managed to leave foster care at the age of 16 and obtained a place at The Royal National College for the Blind (RNCB), which was situated in Venns Lane in Hereford.
19. When I arrived at the RNCB I remember being so thankful that I had attended a mainstream school, as opposed to a special needs school, because I found that I had a distinct advantage in terms of social and life skills. Conversely, I found that those who had attended special needs schools were socially awkward, introverted and lacked confidence in all aspects of life. Luckily, I had managed to somehow circumnavigate my mother's "*hell bent*" wish of sending me to a special needs school in Exeter when I was aged 11.
20. I entered foster care at the tender age of 7 ½ and remained here until I was aged 16 before spending the next 4 years at the RNCB. After this, I lived in a hostel when I was aged around 20-21 before moving to a bed and breakfast accommodation on the **GRO-C** in Cardiff when I was aged around 22. I then moved to the lovely flat in which I am now spending my happy 15th year.
21. I don't blame my mother for what happened. Even though I was young at the time, I understood that she was struggling. **GRO-C**
GRO-C I believe that what happened to my father and his subsequent passing has had a profoundly negative effect upon her whole life.
22. Due to my positive attitude I managed to turn my life around and I am now a fully qualified fitness instructor. However, getting to this point did not come without its own challenges and struggles. Due to my poor eyesight, I was turned down for numerous fitness instructor roles which meant that I had to

become self-employed. One of my friend's also went through the care system and sadly emerged with a "*victim mentality*". I am the complete opposite of that; I developed an extremely positive and "*can do*" attitude and my mantras in life are "*life experience is life experience*" and "*what does not kill you makes you stronger*".

23. Covid 19 and the enforced lockdown presented further challenges in respect of earning a living but I have managed to continue working due to modern technology. I have also been doing the shopping for my neighbour who is self isolating due to his skin cancer.

24. I am also incredibly house proud and very happy in my flat. As already stated, I have been here for about 15 years now and I took particular pride and care with the laminate flooring which I laid myself.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

25. I refer to my mother's witness statement.

26. I vaguely remember being offered and attending some sort of counselling when I was in secondary school. However, nothing was offered after this until April 2020. I don't know whether this was something that had been organised by the Inquiry; all I know is that my mother told me that I had a counselling appointment on 4th April 2020. I attended this appointment which was conducted on the telephone due to Covid 19. (Richard how did you find this session or is it the case of being offered too little too late and in any event it has been your positive attitude that has enabled you make a success of your life?)

Because of the lockdown I did not see or speak to the counsellor, but it would of been helpful if it had been offered all sooner.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

27. When I was aged 18 I was given some money from my mother who told me that my father had put it away for me. I refer to my mother's witness statement for further information in this regard.

Section 8. Other Issues

28. I want answers for each and every person who has been infected and/or affected by this tragedy. I want those persons who were responsible for those catastrophic decisions to be held accountable.

Anonymity

29. I do not want to apply for anonymity and I do not wish to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed... **GRO-C**

Dated... **06/07/2020**