

Witness Name: Bronwyn Rae-Le Bourn

Statement No.: WITN2052001

Dated: 19 February 2019

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF BRONWYN RAE-LE BOURN

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Bronwyn Rae-Le Bourn. My date of birth and address are known to the Inquiry.
2. I am currently a student on the Legal Practice Course, training to become a solicitor. I will start my training contract in September 2019.

Section 2: How Affected

3. I am writing this statement in memory of my late father, Paul David Le Bourn. My father was infected with Hepatitis C (HCV) by a blood transfusion in 1982 after a motorcycle accident. He died in June 2013.
4. My mother Penelope Rae has also submitted a written statement for the Inquiry (Statement no: **WITN1962001**). Please see her statement for full details of my father's diagnosis and how he was told about his infection.

Section 3: Other infections

5. Please see my mother's statement for details of this.

Section 4: Consent

6. Please see my mother's statement for details of this.

Section 5: Impact

7. I was six years old when my family found out about my father's HCV diagnosis. My memories of my father when I was very young are of a fit and healthy man, able to walk unaided, and able to interact and play with me. I remember him taking me to Lego land. Over the next few years he was less able to walk long distances. I remember him only being able to walk very short distances and then him not really being able to walk at all and using his mobility scooter.
8. Before he was ill, he was happy, funny, and intelligent. As the illness and treatment went on, his moods could change fairly suddenly and my relationship with him became very strained. It became very difficult for me to communicate normally with him. The most difficult bit was his confusion, anger and aggression. I remember him being very confused and in and out of consciousness when he was very sick.
9. Sometimes he would be unconscious and my mother was unable to rouse him. Sometimes he would refuse to go to see a doctor in these situations and my mother wouldn't be able to sit him up. He was very strong and my mother couldn't do it on her own. On one occasion my mother and I had to call an ambulance and hide upstairs in my bedroom until the paramedics arrived, while she attempted to explain to me what my father was doing and why he was so confused and aggressive. When the paramedics arrived, my father assaulted one of them.
10. Because of the effects of my father's illness and his treatment, home could sometimes be a very hostile environment, and sometimes lovely. I remember a time when my father couldn't recognise me when I came home from school

and my mother wasn't there. He was very upset and aggressive; he threw things at me and kept screaming because he didn't understand why I was in the house. I went to my room as it wasn't safe to be around downstairs where he was.

11. My father was given several courses of Ribavirin to treat his HCV. This drastically affected his mental wellbeing. My father became extremely depressed and was prescribed anti-depressants. I know that he tried to kill himself by overdosing on these a few times.
12. My relationship with my father certainly improved over the last few years and it was wonderful. We became really good friends and I loved spending time with him. I was 17, just starting sixth form, and felt like I was only really just getting to know him. Tragically, I didn't get to spend a very long time like this as my father passed away in 2013.
13. My father's death had a very serious effect on my mental health. Around 6 months after my father died I started to become severely anxious and experienced very extreme moments of what is probably best described as existential crisis. My mind would think of what death was and how someone could become nothingness and then I'd just get this overwhelming feeling of blackness and it would make me very scared. I'd also see bits of flesh falling off my hands when I looked at them. I was completely unable to go about my normal daily life.
14. I have since managed to bring that under control, but I still really struggle with the feeling of darkness and nothingness and the idea of death is extremely difficult. I'd say normally this would be a problem 7 days a week and can be the first thing I think about in the morning and the last thing I think about at night. When it's better it probably only pops up 1 or 2 times a week. I now recognise these as potential symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

15. The impact of my father's HCV infection on our family life was catastrophic. It tore our family apart. My mother and father's relationship was not of a husband and wife – more of a brother and sister. My mother really struggled with it and lost a lot of weight. On one occasion, she collapsed in front of me while we were at a concert, due to not eating for a prolonged period of time. This was very difficult for me to see as I knew she had done this to herself and I was also struggling with my mental health at the time.
16. I was bullied a lot at school due to the stigma around HCV. I remember one instance when I was in homework club, the girls I was sat round the table with said "my mum told me your dad is retarded and should just get on and die". They used to stare at my father in his mobility scooter and whisper under their breath about him, which would make him upset and angry.
17. The children at school knew I was different and I was having problems at home, and targeted me because of this. They bullied me physically as well as emotionally. Once at the playground at school, some girls came and threw stones at me and tore my dress off.
18. As a result of this bullying, I often tried to hurt myself so I could go to the infirmary and be taken home from school. I used to repeatedly hit my wrist on the bannisters at school to try to fracture my bone so I could leave. I spent a lot of time in my room at home.
19. As I got older I became more angry and upset. I didn't really know what or how I was feeling or why, but I felt different to everyone else. I think that I had to grow up a lot earlier than some of my peers because of what was happening in my family.
20. I started to have panic attacks at school. I started to take paracetamol obsessively and I ended up overdosing on it. I believe I did this as a call for help, to have some control over part of my life when most of it seemed to be completely out of my control. I was taken to hospital and stayed there for

around a week. I remember that CAMHS came to visit me in hospital, and they told my mother I was completely fine.

21. At this point I was on the cusp of needing a liver transplant and they'd discussed transferring me to Great Ormond Street Hospital. I can't imagine what this would have done to my mother. My mother had to give up work to look after me. There was no other household income.
22. At one point in senior school, I think when I was 15, I ran away from home. After this, my mother told my father he had to move out and he lived in sheltered accommodation. I didn't see him very much – about twice a week for coffee or a meal. He phoned every day, up to 5 times a day, and wrote some letters to me which I still have. He didn't understand what had happened or why he couldn't live with us full-time.
23. I regret the fact that he couldn't live with us with all my heart. If I'd known I was wasting my last few years with him it would have been very different, I would have sorted something else out. The pain of hindsight I suppose.
24. My father's illness had a serious effect on my education. After my paracetamol overdose, my school refused to have me back. They wouldn't even consider me being in class for just practical science with my mum in the back of the room. They said it was because of their insurance policy, should something happen to me while at their school.
25. In the end I was able to go back to school to finish some of my exams, but I didn't do as well in my GCSE's as I'd hoped or was initially predicted. This was difficult for me as I am very motivated and always want to do my best, and was predicted to get all As in my GCSEs. I felt I wasn't able to finish what I had started.
26. I then went to sixth form at a local college, but it was not the right fit and I determined it would be better to go to a boarding school and re-take the year.

I had a great experience there as they were very supportive of me. From there I went to Exeter University.

27. My father passed away during my exams in my second year of university, which was extremely traumatic for me. I had to travel back home from university to say goodbye to him at hospital. The run up to his death had a massive effect on my ability to concentrate on my studies, both emotionally and because I had to spend time travelling home to visit him. The university refused to take my mitigating circumstances into account in the final awarding of my degree result, so my results were lower than they should have been.
28. Even now, almost 6 years later, my father's death has had a knock on effect on my education. For example, when I applied for my masters, King's College needed proof that Exeter didn't take my family circumstances into account for my degree result. I feel as I have been struggling to get institutions to understand what has happened for years, in addition to the emotional stress of dealing with my father's illness and death.
29. This has also seriously affected my prospects of applying for training contracts. I have now secured one to begin in September 2019, however there are so many people applying for training contracts that even though I had also completed a masters degree and had excelled there, firms were only interested in my undergraduate degree result which was lower than it should have been.

Section 6: Treatment/Care/Support

30. We were never offered counselling or psychological support by any of the medical professionals treating my father.
31. After my overdose at 15, I was told by my school that I could not return to school, I either had to go to counselling or be sectioned. My mother wouldn't allow me to be sectioned due to the consequences, however there was a very long wait for NHS help so we had to ask for financial help from family

members and pay a private child psychiatrist for £250 an hour. I saw this therapist approximately 8 to 10 times over a period of 2 to 3 months.

32. I still struggle with anxiety and worry about dying, anywhere from 1-2 to 7 days a week. My anxiety comes on quite suddenly and intensely and I believe I may have symptoms of PTSD. I do think I would benefit from counselling or specialist trauma therapy if it were offered.

Section 7: Financial Assistance

33. I understand that my parents applied for and received some money from the Skipton Fund for assistance with my rent while I was at university. I do not remember how much money was received.

Section 8: Other Issues

34. I am concerned that when I asked my new GP in London if I could be tested for HCV he said he would have to check their insurance policy. I would like the Inquiry to spread awareness of the issue so that this does not happen to others in future.
35. I would like the Inquiry to provide information about what happened and why so that it can never happen to anyone again.
36. I would also like those that are responsible for this scandal to be held accountable and justice to be served.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated 19 February 2019.....