



Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess

EXHIBIT 71

Statement of Jill Whittemore dated 28 April 2020



STATEMENT OF A WITNESS

In the matter of: Investigation into the Ruby Princess and COVID-19 related deaths
Place: [REDACTED] California, USA
Date: 28 April 2020

Name: Jill WHITTEMORE

STATES:

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I would be prepared, if necessary, to give in court as a witness. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I will be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything that I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.
2. I am 56 years of age.
3. I currently reside in [REDACTED] California, United States. I live with my husband, Sean WHITTEMORE. My husband's parents are Mark and Cheryl WHITTEMORE. My husband's maternal grand-parents are Paul and Shirley GREGORY. Paul GREGORY is Cheryl WHITTEMORE's step-father.
4. In July 2019, Cheryl and I booked to travel on the Ruby Princess Cruise Ship. I remember that sometime before, Cheryl and I were having lunch and she told me that Paul and Shirley had booked on the Ruby Princess. I knew that Paul and Shirley cruised every six (6) months or so. This particular cruise was travelling from Sydney, Australia to New Zealand and return. I had wanted to travel to Australia and New Zealand, so when Cheryl then asked me whether I wanted to go, I said that I did.
5. Our husbands weren't interested in coming so Cheryl and I booked to go with Paul and Shirley. We booked online through Princess Cruises to travel on the Ruby Princess from Sydney on 8 March 2020. This cruise was to travel to New Zealand and return to Sydney on 21 March 2020. I had been on three (3) cruises previously with Princess Cruises, and one (1) with another company. I previously had good experiences with Princess Cruises. I had not previously been on the Ruby Princess. Our flights were made through the same booking.

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6. Cheryl, Paul, Shirley and I all flew into Sydney International Airport at 6.30am on the morning of Saturday, 8 March 2020. We flew out of San Francisco on the evening of 6 March 2020 (Pacific Daylight Time - PDT) on Qantas flight QF74. When we arrived in Sydney, we waited at the airport for a shuttle bus that had been pre-arranged through our booking with Princess. We were taken on that shuttle, with a number of others, and arrived at Circular Quay around 8.30am-9.00am.
7. When we arrived at the ship, we noticed that there were still people onboard. Our luggage had been taken from the shuttle for us, but we still had our hand luggage. We had been assigned 12.30pm as our check-in time but that was later delayed. Throughout the day there were a lot of people standing around in lines. We didn't know what was going on. There were no explanations for the delay. Later in the morning or early afternoon, we did try and ask the staff the reason for the delay, but I really don't think that they even knew. We were told that they were doing a deep clean of the ship or that they just didn't know.
8. At one stage we were told to go and get lunch. We didn't want to go too far, so we just walked around the area and over to the Sydney Opera House. We were later told to provide our receipt for lunch, and we would be reimbursed. Communication throughout the day was horrible. By the time we were able to board the ship I was exhausted. I would have been equally happy for the cruise to have been cancelled, as I would have been to board. I had had enough.
9. We finally boarded the ship around 5pm. We had already checked-in and provided all of our information online, so once the process began it was quite quick for us. We had already been given our medallions which had all of our information on them. Our passports and bags were checked and we were allowed onboard. Apart from the medallions, which I had never used before, the process seemed pretty much the same. I normally sail from San Francisco, this was the first time that I sailed from Sydney, but the processes were only slightly different, nothing seemed particularly out of the ordinary.
10. We were given a wellness questionnaire earlier in the day, prior to boarding, which we filled out and handed to staff when getting onboard. The wellness questionnaire asked whether we had been in Italy, China and a number of other countries, and whether we had been sick or had fever in the fourteen (14) days prior to the cruise. I don't recall whether there were any

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questions about COVID-19. I had not been in any of the countries listed, nor had I been sick prior to the cruise. We did not have any pre-existing medical conditions.

11. I did not notice any extra measures in relation to health and hygiene. There was wide-spread hand sanitiser throughout the dining areas and up on deck. We did have an awareness of Coronavirus / COVID-19 prior to getting on the cruise and were worried to an extent. The four (4) of us had a conversation about whether to go on the cruise and we all agreed to go, as we had heard that Australia and New Zealand were low risk. We also tried to be very careful ourselves. We were all very cautious in the airports, trying not to touch anything and in washing our hands.
12. Once onboard, Cheryl and I went to the Horizon Court for something to eat before then going to our respective rooms. Cheryl and I were in cabin no. [REDACTED] which was on Emerald Deck, Deck 8. Paul and Shirley were in a separate cabin, on the same deck. I don't know what time the ship sailed out as I was fast asleep. I don't recall anything else happening that night after boarding. We had flown fourteen (14) hours from San Francisco and then waited at Circular Quay all day prior to boarding. I was exhausted and went straight to sleep.
13. During the cruise, I got off the ship in four (4) separate ports. In Dunedin, Cheryl and I did an arranged tour to Larnachs Castle. In Akaroa, the four (4) of us went to Christchurch and did our own thing. In Wellington, I went on an organised tour to the Te Papa Museum and also did a Cable Car tour. In Napier, I went on the organised Art Deco, Aquarium and Prison tours. With the exception of Akaroa, where we spent eight (8) hours, I would estimate that we spent six (6) hours in each port.
14. On each occasion we used the medallions to sign in and out. Before each tour we assembled in the Princess Theatre where we were given a number for our tour group. We would all wait in the theatre until the tour was ready, then we would walk out to a shuttle bus. I would estimate that there were a couple of hundred people in the theatre on each occasion. When the tour was done, the shuttle bus would bring us back to the ship where we would check-in using our medallions and have our belongings scanned before re-boarding. There were always hand washing stations, hand sanitiser, hot towels and ice-cold water to drink upon reboarding.

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15. Whilst onboard I spent my time in the Horizon Court for meals, the Atrium for shopping / entertainment, the art gallery, the Princess Theatre for shows, on deck for movies, and other lounges for entertainment. The medallions weren't required for entry to any of the shows or entertainment.
16. Cheryl and I ate most nights in the Horizon Court. This was a buffet where, at the beginning of the cruise, we were allowed to serve ourselves. About one week into the cruise, the staff served our food, we were no longer permitted to take our own food. Then 2 or 3 days before the end of the cruise, we were then permitted to serve ourselves once again. I considered this strange, this had never happened before and it happened without explanation.
17. When we ate in Horizon Court, we would often sit with people that we didn't know. We would simply seek out and occupy two empty seats. Cheryl and I did, on a couple of nights, eat with Paul and Shirley in the Botticelli Dining Room. When we did so, it was at 5pm on Table 28, and it was only the four (4) of us on the table. We had the same waiter each time, but I do not know his name.
18. I did not really get to know anyone else on the ship by name. I sat next to strangers at meals, on tours and at shows but I would not say that I really made their acquaintance. There were so many passengers on the ship, it was hard to say whether I had met someone before or remember their name/s. The same applied for the staff. I know that the same person cleaned our room every day, but I did not know their name.
19. About 16 or 17 March 2020, the ship turned back for Sydney. I remember that it was the same day that the boat stopped in Napier, when we got back on board after the day's tours. The Commodore, who was on his last cruise, announced that the ship was turning back for Sydney as the New Zealand and Australian governments had decided to cut the cruise short.
20. There was very limited information received after Napier. There had previously been an announcement from the Cruise Director, hoping that the cruise would continue as scheduled, however, we were meant to go to Tauranga and never got there. There were rumours of the cruise disembarking at the next port, which would have been Auckland, but that didn't happen. All we heard was that Australia wanted the ship back immediately. We weren't sure whether we would return to Sydney on 21 March 2020 as scheduled, or otherwise.

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21. There was no mention of anyone onboard suffering from COVID-19. I didn't see anyone that was sick and there was no-one wearing gloves or a mask. I had no knowledge of anyone sick or self-isolating and there were too many passengers to notice if someone was missing. Most passengers in passing were saying, "Oh, we were lucky that there hasn't been anyone infected..." and there were jokes about people, not on the cruise, hoarding toilet paper. I felt that we were oblivious to what was going on worldwide and to some extent, what was going on, on the ship. I feel that there was misinformation, that the staff weren't being totally forthcoming with information.
22. There was no request for social distancing onboard, nor a change in habits. There was also no health announcement. In fact, there was a huge St Patrick's Day party on 17 March 2020, in one of the lounges. There was a show in the Princess Theatre and then a party in the lounge with an Irish band. There were a lot of people there and no social distancing.
23. On Wednesday, 18 March 2020, we were advised that we would likely be back in Sydney the following day. That evening, we received information, via a letter left in our room, that our flight had been changed by Princess Cruises, to depart Sydney on 19 March 2020. This happened automatically as we had booked and paid for our airfares through Princess Cruises. We did not request this but were happy for the change. I cannot recall whether it was on this night or the night before, we also had a document left in our room titled, "*Department of Health Information Sheet for international travellers on COVID-19 and isolation guidance*". There was also paperwork left in our room to indicate that we needed to be in the Wheelhouse Bar at 7.30am. We were assigned to group 'Blue 2' for disembarkation.
24. On Thursday, 19 March 2020, Paul, Shirley, Cheryl and I arrived at the Wheelhouse Bar prior to 7.30am. We had our hand luggage with us but had put our luggage outside our cabins at 10pm the night before, to be collected by the crew. I would say that the longest part of disembarkation was walking from our room to the Wheelhouse Bar. We were in the Wheelhouse Bar for about a half hour / 45 minutes. At the time there were a couple hundred people since it was spread out throughout the morning. I did not observe anyone sick.
25. The crew all lined up and waved us goodbye as we walked from the Wheelhouse Bar to the gangway. From there we went through Customs, got our baggage from the holding area and waited for the bus to the airport. The process going through Customs was very easy, there

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weren't any questions at all. All of the crew and Customs staff were wearing gloves, we however, were not offered any protective equipment. We did not receive any further documentation outside what had been left in our rooms on the evening of the 17 or 18 March 2020.

26. We didn't have to wait very long for a bus to take us to the airport. The bus was a large tour bus and there were about 50 to 60 people onboard. We arrived at the airport around 9:30. We checked in and walked around the airport before then going to the gate, where we waited for the flight to begin boarding.
27. Shortly before 1pm, we boarded United Airlines flight UA 870 to San Francisco. The flight was approximately 95% full. I had two seats in front of me open, but very few others were vacant. This was a direct flight, arriving in San Francisco around 8.40am on Thursday, 19 March 2020 (PDT). This would equate to 2.40am on Friday, 20 March 2020 in Sydney. From the airport we all took a shuttle to our car and then drove home.
28. I would estimate that I arrived home around 12pm and self-isolated from that time. I live with my husband only. I felt fine, I had no symptoms of any illness. I did spend time with my husband but did not leave the house or see any other people.
29. Later that evening, at 5.47pm, I received an email from the NSW Health COVID-19 Response Team that advised that there had been several confirmed COVID-19 cases from the Ruby Princess cruise ship and I was considered a 'close contact'. I took this to mean that someone on the ship had tested positive. I but did not take it to mean that I had been in direct contact with that particular person / people, since it is a large ship and you walk past many different people on a given day. It said that I had to remain in home isolation up to and including 2 April 2020. There were a number of links to documents in the email including fact sheets for novel-coronavirus, COVID-19 and about home isolation. The email asked that I confirm receipt by sending a separate email indicating my name to a link provided. I did respond that I had received the email.
30. Around 3am on Saturday, 21 March 2020 (PDT), I woke with major aches and my temperature was 101.8 degrees Fahrenheit. I slept all day that day. I still had a fever the following day. I did not have a cough or shortness of breath.

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31. That evening, I received another email from Princess Cruises titled, "Important Health Advisory". In short that email said the same things as the email and linked documents I received on 19 March 2020.
32. There was a link in the email that went to a letter from Dr Christine SELVEY from the NSW Ministry of Health dated 21 March 2020. In that letter, I was instructed to contact my local public health authority and inform them that I had been identified as a close contact. It said to seek medical attention if I had symptoms.
33. I kept in contact with Cheryl, Paul and Shirley after arriving home, mostly via SMS. On Sunday, 22 March 2020 (PDT), I am aware that Paul began to feel ill. He was feeling fatigued and had a cough.
34. On Monday, 23 March 2020 (PDT), when I was still unwell, I contacted my doctor and public health authority to describe my symptoms and that I had recently travelled internationally, on the Ruby Princess. It was also on this date, that Shirley also began to feel ill. She was feeling weak and tired. To my understanding, Paul was feeling better on this day.
35. On Tuesday, 24 March 2020 (PDT), I was contacted by my personal physician's nurse and then was contacted by the Public health department and told that I now needed to be tested. I drove myself to Mercy Medical Centre, [REDACTED], California. I was given a mask and isolated in a room away from others. I was seen to by a doctor and a nurse and tested for both flu and COVID-19. I was notified on the same day that the flu test had come back negative. My information from Paul and Shirley on 24 March was that Paul was running a fever and Shirley was tired and had a cough. They [REDACTED] [REDACTED] were tested for COVID-19. At the timing of testing, both were running low grade fevers and were prescribed antibiotics. Paul's oxygen level was low, so he was also prescribed an inhaler. Shirley was given cough syrup for her cough.
36. On 26 March 2020 (PDT), I received my test results for COVID-19 which was positive. I think I was only the second or third positive diagnosis in our county for COVID-19. I felt completely fine by this time. I feel that I only a had a very mild case. I only ever had a fever and fatigue. Paul and Shirley received their test results on this date which showed that they were positive

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for COVID-19. Paul was taken to hospital but only stayed for the day before being discharged. I did not have information as to why he was released.

37. On Monday, 30 March 2020 (PDT), Paul and Shirley were both admitted to hospital [REDACTED]. They were transported by ambulance. Both were having difficulty breathing (Pneumonia) and Shirley was on antibiotics which were making her sick to her stomach.

38. On Tuesday, 7 April 2020 (PDT), Shirley passed away in hospital. Paul passed away the following day.

39. I was released from quarantine in the week beginning Monday, 13 April 2020 (PDT), but my doctor extended my quarantine for an extra two weeks. My doctor is Dr Nancy KEELER [REDACTED]. I work for the county and am considered an essential worker so she wanted to exercise caution before sending me back. I have not experienced any further symptoms but Dr KEELER wants me to be retested to confirm that I am now negative from COVID-19.

40. At 4.20pm on Wednesday, 22 April 2020 (PDT), I had a telephone conversation with Detective Sasha PINAZZA from the Homicide Squad in Sydney, Australia. I provided information that formed the basis of this statement. Following that conversation, I was notified by my doctor's officer that I did not have to be retested for COVID-19 as I had not had symptoms for over 72 hours.

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