



Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess

EXHIBIT 76

Statement of Josephine Roope dated 16 April 2020

**STATEMENT OF A WITNESS**

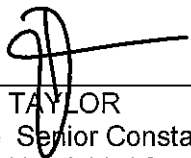
In the matter of: SF BAST
Place: Unsolved Homicide/ State Crime Command
Date: 16 April 2020

Name: Josephine ROOPE

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 80 years of age.
3. I was born 23 June [REDACTED] in Essex, England. I met my husband Val in 1956 and we were married in 1960. We moved to Australia in 1966 and went to a hostel in Wollongong. We moved over to Perth for a year before moving back to Wollongong. From our marriage we have 4 children, Peter, David, Richard and Jackie. Val sadly passed away in 2011. I am retired and worked part time at Horsley Homestead doing functions. Up until then I had been a stay at home mum.
4. I am long-time family friend of Brian and Lesley BACON (Les). Val and I met Brian and Les BACON when we moved into the hostel at Wollongong, they had also come over from England. We have been friends for over 50 years. We've had a lot of family holidays together over the years. Brian, Les and I did a cruise to Tasmania in 2018 on another Princess ship. This was my first time on the Ruby Princess Sadly, passed away on the 24 March 2020 of COVID-19 after sailing on the Ruby Princess.
5. Brian, Lesley and I decided to go a cruise this year for no reason, more that Les wanted to go on another cruise. We booked the cruise with ESTOURS Travel Agent in Keiraville. The cruise we booked was a 13-night tour around New Zealand leaving Sydney on 8 March 2020.

Witness:


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6 MAY 2020

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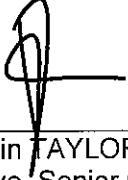
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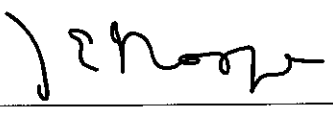
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6. On 8 March 2020, Brian and Lesley's son Gary, drove us from Wollongong to the International Cruise Ship Terminal at Circular Quay. We were due to board the ship about 12pm but didn't end up boarding until 5.30-6pm. We were informed that there was a delay in boarding as we were waiting for the NSW Health Department to clear the ship, I was receiving text messages on my phone from Princess Cruises about the delay. We dropped our luggage off and went to the Fortune of War pub in The Rocks and stayed there for a while. After lunch we walked back down to the terminal to check-in. Prior to getting on the ship we were put in this large room on the terminal and waited for about an hour. The room was packed with passengers, but we managed to find a seat. At 5:37pm I received a message to say that the cruise was cleared by the health department.
7. Prior to getting on the ship, I was surprised that there was no testing of passenger's temperatures and customs had pushed us through in a big hurry. I was told this by a friend who had just come off another cruise about a week or two before.
8. Before going on the cruise, I was in pretty good health, my only problem was controlled blood pressure that I was taking medication for. I was excited to go on the cruise. Les seemed down and lethargic. She didn't seem to be excited. At that time Les had no pain in her leg. She usually used a walking stick to walk around with assistance. Health wise she appeared to be normal.
9. Brian, Lesley and I were allocated cabin [REDACTED]. This room had a balcony and was located on the Caribe Deck – Deck 10. Brian, Lesley and I were the only people in the room.
10. When we boarded the ship, we went straight to our room, dropped everything we had off. We wandered around the ship for a while before returning to the ship. We got ready and headed off for dinner. We went to Da Vinci Dinning Room for dinner and just relaxed. I can't remember where we were or what time the ship started leaving Sydney.
11. We cruised for a couple of days, went through Fiordland and the Sounds, before stopping at Dunedin. Les was feeling pretty good the first couple of days. When we stopped at Dunedin, were getting off the bottom of the gangplank and Les started to complain about her left leg. She was excruciating pain and couldn't move it. Les was going to go back on the ship, so Brian and

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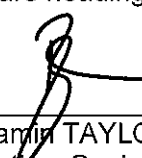
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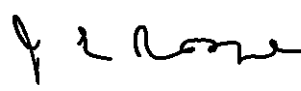
I continued to pick up our bus tickets to go into town. As we were getting our bus tickets Les was brought up by a cart and to us. We all got on the bus and went into Dunedin. We didn't do much there as Les couldn't walk, she bought another walking stick and seemed better to get around. We didn't spend much time there, so we went back to the ship and had lunch. When we got back to the ship I went for a walk and I think Les went to lay down. She wasn't showing any flu like symptoms just more pain in her leg. We went to the formal night for dinner and saw a magician show. She seemed ok throughout.

12. The next day we stopped at Akaroa, Les was booked to go swimming with the dolphins but didn't end up going because of the pain in her leg, she stayed on board. Brian and I went ashore and day trip on a ketch. When we returned, Les told us that she had been down to the medical centre and got some painkillers for her leg, they had no idea what the pain in her leg was.
13. The next port was Wellington. We all went ashore, we had coffee down at the waterfront, there was a St Patricks Day march on. Les still couldn't walk so we stayed in Wellington for a short time and went back to the ship for lunch. I went for walk around the deck and Les went back to her room for a rest. I think it was this day that Les and Brian had asked about getting a wheelchair, they were told they could not take one ashore. That night she seemed ok. Went down to dinner, we went to the Crooners Bar for the evening listening to the piano players. Les wasn't showing any symptoms at this stage. We were our room a bit later, I was reading a book when it appeared that Les starting to develop a cough, but I didn't think anything of it.
14. Our next port was Napier, we all went ashore, Les wanted to go shopping fort t-shirts, she appeared to be doing ok getting around, she got more pain killers. Les and Brian went off shopping, I went off and had a coffee and met up with them later. I think it was today that she asked for a walker from the medical centre and came back with a walking frame, one that you had to lift and move. She seemed ok, we went to dinner as usual and possibly a show maybe even back to the Crooners Bar. Just a laid-back evening. I noticed Les was coughing a bit but just didn't register as anything bad.
15. When we left Napier, the captain made an announcement stating that Auckland has refused us entry and we are heading back to Australia and we had to self-isolate as soon as we get home.

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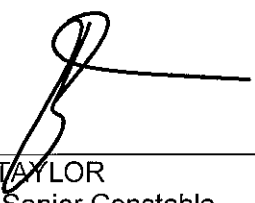
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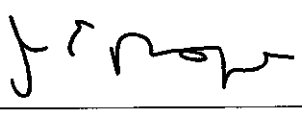
I recall him saying that part of the isolation was the remainder of this cruise. There was no reason given, no mention of people being unwell or Coronavirus. We were sitting in the Crooners Bar when we heard this announcement. Napier was our last port. It took us about 4 days to get back to Australia.

16. During the cruise days home Les leg pain was really bad, she was a diabetic and her sugar count was up [REDACTED]. She took herself to the medical centre and the doctor increased her insulin, but it didn't appear to work, the next day it was still the same. The doctor wouldn't look into why her insulin was increasing. Les was very lethargic, nothing unusual, I presume it was her leg. She was getting very stressed over it.
17. Les decided to stay in the cabin that evening, she had a hot shower and relaxed, she had slept soundly all afternoon, which was unusual for her, it wasn't just nanna nap. She didn't complain about being ill. She came to dinner with us that night, but she didn't eat much and didn't have a wine, which was also not like her. Brian and I went to a show and Les went back to the cabin. Upon our return, Les had taken herself down to the medical centre. Les had brought her own thermometer and noticed that she had used it. Brian received a call from the medical centre telling him to come down as Les was there. Brian went down, I stayed in the cabin. About 45 minutes later Brian came back without Les, he was told by the medical staff that she only had the flu and they were keeping in overnight. They told Brian and I that we had to go down the next morning with our passports and immigration forms to be photocopied.
18. On 18 March 2020, Brian and I were at the medical centre at 9am and waited 2 hours, I filled out a medical form because I was going to be given some treatment, I don't know what for. Eventually my temperature was taken and was given pills to take for the next 5 days, they didn't say what the pills were for, just a treatment, but I wasn't sick. After that we sat with Les, she had her leg X-rayed, but we weren't told the results of this. She didn't look too bad, she was sitting up in a bed talking, she had a drip in her arm, and I asked about her temperature, she said it was fine, they told her she had the flu and would be fine. I asked the medial staff, a female, not sure if she was the doctor or a nurse about Les condition, she told me that Les only had 'The Flu' and she was going to be fine. I thought she was coming back to the cabin with us

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but ended up staying in the medical centre. Brian and I went back to the cabin and started packing our bags and had lunch. Brian went back to sit with her, and I went for a walk.

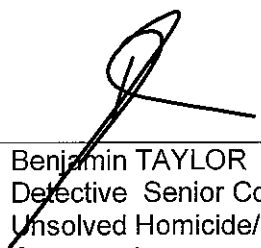
19. Later that afternoon, I returned to the medical centre and waited outside for about half an hour before going into see Les. When I walked in Les had been laid down, she had the oxygen tubes in nose and had a wet towel around her neck. I assumed that her temperature had gone up. She didn't look good then and her voice was very croaky. In a few hours from first seeing that morning, her condition had deteriorated rapidly. I had asked medical staff about her condition, to which they again stated, it was only 'The Flu'.

20. That afternoon I noticed that some staff wearing face masks as were quite a few of the passengers coming in and out wearing masks, while I was in the room. I recall one of the guests being told by medical staff to go to their cabin and isolate. I can't recall when, but Brian and I were told to come down to the medical centre at 2am on the morning of 19 March 2020. When I questioned them about this, they just told us to be there. I'm not sure what position this lady had on the ship but seemed to be controlling things and I found her to be very rude. She informed us that Les would be leaving the ship in an ambulance.

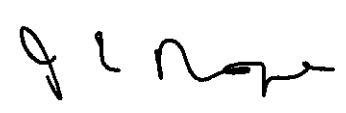
21. When Brian and I headed back to our cabin I noticed another cabin door had black padding around the edges and on the door itself, it was completely covered. I asked one of the cabin staff about the door and was told that it was so the people inside would not hurt themselves going in and out, I thought this was strange.

22. When we returned to the cabin, we realised that we had only been given our passports back with no immigration forms. We had a couple of extra forms filed them just as back up perhaps they had misplaced the ones we took down. In our cabin during that evening an officer came to the door wanting our immigration forms handed over, the second lot, we filled in just not thinking straight trying to calm Brian down, he was a mess because of who Les was. I kept trying to reassure him that she was ok. I couldn't understand why we had to issue our immigration forms when they already had it. At that point I didn't care or wasn't really thinking because of what was going on with Les.

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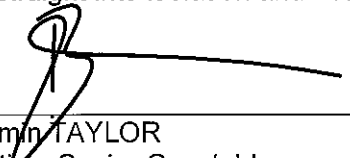

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23. At 2am on 19 March 2020, we went down to the medical centre, we were asked where our luggage was (our luggage had been collected) once again the lady was quite rude, she was angry because we didn't have our luggage. I questioned why we had to be there when Les was going in an ambulance. Once again, I questioned why we had to go with when we were told it was only 'The Flu'. She confirmed yes it was only the flu and there was nothing to worry about. I then informed no way we're leaving this ship as planned and going home to self-isolate. I told her that if she only had the flu then I'm not going in the ambulance, I'm going home to self-isolate.
24. Another lady that I had seen wandering around tall, short dark hair, in blue came out of her office when informed of my decision, I later discovered that it was the head doctor. She said it's up to you, did you bring any clean clothes for your friend. Once again, I asked is it only the flu? both said yes. Brian was then told to go up to the desk upstairs, Guest Services we questioned why, they wouldn't say they just kept telling Brian to go up there. That was the last time that I saw Les, I popped my head around to see her, she appeared to be sleeping and still had tubes in her. We never saw her leave the ship in the ambulance.
25. I went with Brian to Guest Services. He was told to settle his account manually and not with the medallion which appeared to be strange, they weren't very helpful. This account included Les's medical bill on the ship which amounted to [REDACTED]. He was a bit short of paying that amount, so I helped him out. We returned to the cabin and rested for a few hours. When we got up, we had breakfast and went to our disembarkation area. We disembarked about 10am. While we were getting off, we were stopped at the top of the gangway and our immigration forms returned by a female officer and apologised. Brian and I finally got off the ship. When we got off, we didn't go through Customs, we handed a male our immigration forms and left the terminal. I also thought it was strange that our temperatures were taken before we got off the ship.
26. When we saw Les in the medical centre, we were not given any masks or protective gear and she was not in any kind of isolation. We could just wander in and wander out.
27. When got out of the terminal, Brian had gone to the toilet, Gary had rung me and told me that Les had gone straight into isolation and not to tell Brian. Gary drove Brian and I home to

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Wollongong where I self-isolated when I got home for 3 weeks. As I was in isolation I couldn't go and see Les. I spoke to Gary who told me that she had been diagnosed with Coronavirus and was sedated. She wasn't in a good way and be to prepare for the worst.

28. On 24 March 2020, I received a phone call from Gary, and he told me that Les had sadly passed away.
29. While we're on the ship we spent most nights at the Crooners Bar, watched 3 shows in the theatre. We had the buffet breakfast and lunch at Horizons. For dinner we would alternate between Da Vinci Dinning and Michelangelo. We never had a set table; we went in a different time and sat in different seats. Some nights we sat with a few the people but most nights it was just the 3 of us. We basically went everywhere around the ship.
30. I noticed at Horizons there was no sanitising stations at the entrance, they were near the food areas. At the entrance you could get your milk, coffee cups etc at the door without sanitising. I also noticed that the staff who were cleaning the plates and removing the reusable material napkins were not using gloves. At other food places there was staff making sure you sanitised your hands.
31. We didn't associate with anyone. The 3 of us just kept to ourselves. We met a lot of the staff and mainly spoke to one of the girls, Anna in the buffet. Jeffrey was our cabin steward and we talk to him generally. All the staff were lovely.
32. When we boarded the ship, we not given any instructions about where to find the medical centre or how to contact medical staff. We were just given a map of the ship when we received our medallions. The only instruction given was the safety drill.
33. Before going on the cruise, I was aware of Coronavirus through the media. We had a received an email from Princess Cruises asking if we wanted to cancel. The virus didn't concern me at that time, I did seriously think about cancelling but thought we'll be right. It wasn't really an issue in Australia. I was a bit more concerned when we got to the ship and NSW Health had not cleared it straight away, but this still didn't stop me from going.

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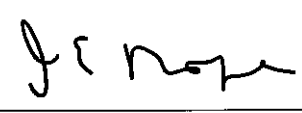
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34. I don't think I contracted Coronavirus, I didn't get tested I was told to stay at home and if I got sick to call an ambulance. If I did, I would have only had a minor case as I showed no symptoms.
35. We were not given any information about Coronavirus on the ship, there was no mention of it. I don't recall any announcements being made. I didn't hear any discussions between passengers about Coronavirus. We never discussed it between ourselves, we were prepared with sanitiser, rubber gloves, Glen 20, soaps to prevent infection.
36. It became more concerning when we turned back to Sydney. I noticed there was a lot more cleaning on the ship taking place, they were cleaning the handrails, the main toilet doors were left open. In Horizons there was a lot more cleaning going on, not like they were at the start of the cruise, and the staff started to serve the food to passengers.
37. Besides Les, I did not see people who appeared to be sick, but I did see a few people with face masks walking around and in the medical centre. Other than the black padded door I spoke about, I did not see any rooms or places on the ship that were isolated or secured off. I didn't see any large crowds together at one time, people seemed to be speared out all over the ship, we were never felt over-crowded. We didn't go out much over the last couple of days of the cruise because of how Les was.

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