1	Friday, 25 February 2022	1	Post Office deducted in excess of £15,000 to £20,000
2		2	in relation to alleged shortfalls. Stephanie says:
3	(10.15 am)	3	"There was not a month that went by where I was
4	(Proceedings delayed)	4	not putting money in."
5	(10.19 am)	5	Stephanie asked repeatedly for assistance from
6	MR STEIN: Sir, as you are aware, the next witness to give	6	the Post Office. None was forthcoming and her area
7	evidence was going to be Stephanie Reilly.	7	manager said it would be like looking for a needle in
8	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.	8	a haystack. Stephanie felt bullied and intimidated by
9	MR STEIN: She has found the prospect of doing so simply	9	her area manager. She was made to cry in front of
10	too much so, with your leave, sir, I will be reading	10	customers.
11	this morning a summary of her evidence.	11	Stephanie requested a further audit and asked
12	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, please do that now.	12	Dave Brown, an auditor, if they could audit some
13	STEPHANIE REILLY, statement summarised by MR STEIN, QC	13	historical documents relating to her branch.
14	MR STEIN: So this is a summary of the statement of	14	Stephanie was told that the Post Office records did
15	Ms Stephanie Reilly.	15	not go back that far.
16	Stephanie has been a hard-working woman since	16	Mr Brown and Stephanie found a transaction that
17	the age of 16. Stephanie became the postmistress of	17	seemed like a duplication and needed to be reversed
18	the Post Office in Hetton-le-Hole, which is in	18	back to Chesterfield. Stephanie was very happy as she
19	Sunderland, on 27 November 2009.	19	thought that if this duplication had been found, then
20	Stephanie had problems with the Horizon system	20	she would find the rest. However, the following day
21	from the word go. She would call the helpline two or	21	Ms Lax dismissed the duplication over the phone and
22	three times a week about shortfalls and balancing. On	22	told Stephanie that the money had obviously been
23	occasions, the shortfall would increase as a result of	23	stolen and that Mr Brown had not said to her that
24	the advice from the helpline.	24	there was a duplication. Ms Lax told Stephanie that
25	Stephanie estimates that she paid or the	25	the money had to be paid back or the Post Office would 2
1	start legal proceedings against her.	1	by the Post Office, effectively as a thief. She asked

start legal proceedings against her.

Stephanie agreed to the Post Office taking £800 a month out of her wages as she was scared of being prosecuted.

Stephanie had to borrow money off her husband to keep the Post Office afloat. Paying £800 a month for nearly a year nearly broke Stephanie financially and emotionally. Stephanie says:

"I should not have had to beg for help from the Post Office. It was easy for them to say it was my fault and that I should deal with it."

Eventually, Stephanie had a breakdown and turned to alcohol to cope with the losses.

As the shortfalls got larger, the more Stephanie turned to drink. She had to hire a manager at her own expense to run the Post Office on her behalf as she no longer felt able to carry out her role.

Stephanie went to rehab for eight months and when she came out of rehab she was terrified to run the Post Office. It took Stephanie 12 months after rehab to walk back through the Post Office door because she had lost all confidence in herself and was frightened the shortfalls would happen again.

Stephanie feels deeply aggrieved, not just at her losses but for the manner in which she was treated

by the Post Office, effectively as a thief. She asked for help and the Post Office would not give it.

Stephanie feels she was pushed to one side by the Post Office and that the Post Office's attitude was "You owe us that money, get it paid", regardless of the consequences.

Stephanie says he lost everything about her. She lost her identity and her confidence. Stephanie is now financially out of pocket and her marital home was repossessed. Stephanie's mental health deteriorated rapidly. She was given antidepressants by her GP but they did not work. Stephanie's customers talked about her. There was gossip around the local community and the phrase "plunkie", a local term for alcoholic, was used by the community about her.

Stephanie's son begged her to stop drinking. She had to spend eight months away from her son while she was in rehab, which is time she'll never get back. Stephanie's 22-year marriage broke up as her husband blamed her, as he said it was obviously her causing the Post Office shortfalls.

Stephanie's Mum aged overnight because she was worried about her daughter, due to her alcoholism and problems she was experiencing with the Post Office.

1 Stephanie said in her statement: 1 the situation 2 "I loved the Post Office job, dealing with 2 "My main focus in giving evidence to the Inquiry 3 3 customers, getting to know them all. That is what was to highlight the injustice that was brought upon 4 gets us postmasters through. We postmasters do it 4 us by those at Post Office and to ask if we, the 555 5 because we love it and dealing with community." 5 litigants, will ever receive the money back that was 6 6 Sir, Stephanie has asked in addition that I read stolen from us and ever see the day where justice is 7 the following comments to you. 7 served. 8 "Dear Chair, 8 "I again apologise for not having the strength 9 9 "Please accept my apologies for not attending to attend but I hope myself and others who have 10 today. Like everyone else who has attended and is to 10 suffered horrifically at the hands of Post Office are 11 attend, I wanted to personally speak about my awful 11 dealt with with the compassion and empathy we truly 12 experience to both you and the Inquiry team. 12 deserve." 13 "Unfortunately, on Wednesday morning at 6.00 am 13 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Stein. 14 I had what I can only describe as a complete meltdown. 14 MR BEER: Good morning, sir, can I call Tracy Felstead, 15 The fear and anxiety of reliving everything again hit 15 please. TRACY FELSTEAD (affirmed) 16 16 me square on and brought me to my knees. As my 17 evidence states, due to the problems I had with the 17 Questioned by MR BEER 18 18 MR BEER: Good morning, Ms Felstead? Post Office and the Horizon system, I ended up in 19 rehab for alcohol addiction. 19 Good morning. 20 "For six years, I fought a daily battle to 20 If you keep your voice up, you'll see that sometimes 21 remain in recovery but the thought of reliving this 21 the microphones really do pick up what you say and 22 22 experience was too much to bear. In working with my broadcast it around the room, so just use that as your 23 recovery programme, I am aware of my limitations and 23 test to make sure you are being heard, okay? 24 24 had to make the decision to stay in what I can only A. Okay, thank you. 25 describe as my 'safe zone', and to remove myself from 25 Q. Can you give us your full name, please?

- 1 A. Yes, Ms Tracy Ann Margaret Felstead.
- 2 Q. How old are you now?
- 3 A. I'm 39 years old.
- 4 Q. I think you have got some children, is that right?
- 5 A. I do, I have three boys.
- 6 Q. How old are they?
- 7 **A.** One's nearly 18, one's 15 and one's 11.
- Q. On the table in front of you, there should bea witness statement.
- 10 **A.** Yes.
- 11 Q. Is that right?
- 12 **A.** Yes.
- 13 Q. Is it in your name?
- 14 **A.** Yes.
- 15 Q. Is it dated 15 February at the top?
- 16 A. Yes, it is.
- 17 Q. If you go to the last page, can you see your
- 18 signature, an electronic signature I think?
- 19 A. Yes.
- Q. Is that your electronic signature, and when you made
 the statement were the contents of it true to the best
- 22 of your knowledge and belief?
- 23 A. Yes.
- Q. I am going to ask you some questions about before youjoined the Post Office?

- 2 **Q.** What did you do before you joined the Post Office?
- A. I went to school.

1

A. Yes.

- 4 Q. So what age did you leave school?
- 5 **A.** I left school at 16 and then I stayed at home for
- 6 a bit with my parents and then I moved to London --
- 7 back to London with family. I didn't like the area
- 8 that I lived in with my parents. I was up north. So
- 9 I moved back to London with family and, yeah, then
- 10 I got a job at the Post Office.
- 11 Q. Okay. Which Post Office did you get a job at?
- 12 A. Camberwell Green.
- 13 Q. What kind of Post Office was that?
- 14 A. It was a Crown branch.
- 15 Q. Just explain, to those of us that are not completely
 - all over the detail, what a Crown branch is?
- 17 A. So there were a number of counters. It was run by
- a manager and the manager had a number of staff under
- 19 her.

16

- 20 Q. Okay. How big was the Camberwell Green branch?
- 21 A. It was quite big, fairly big. I think there were,
- from what I can remember, about 12 counters.
- 23 Q. A dozen desks, yes?
- 24 **A.** Yes, there were quite a few.
- 25 Q. So how old were you when you first started working?

- 1 **A.** I was 18.
- 2 **Q.** Your first job?
- 3 A. It was my first job, yes.
- 4 **Q.** I think your formal title was counter clerk; is that right?
- 6 A. Yes, that's correct.
- Q. So did you get any training from the Post Officebefore you became a counter clerk?
- 9 A. I did. When I first started, I was in the back office
- first of all, just doing sort of dockets that got sent out and then I had a few days' training with the
- 12 Post Office to actually go on to the counter.
- 13 Q. Okay. Was that in branch training?
- 14 A. No, it was at a different branch. From what I can
- 15 remember, it was -- I think I went to Herne Hill, so
- 16 I actually went out to a different branch to do that
- 17 training
- 18 **Q.** Did that training include training in the use of the
- 19 Horizon system?
- 20 A. Yes, it did.
- 21 Q. How long did that last, the Horizon training?
- 22 A. It was only a few days, to my knowledge.
- 23 Q. Can you remember how effective it was, the training?
- 24 A. It wasn't in-depth. It was general training on how to
- 25 use the system and how to serve the public.

- 1 **Q.** Did it equip you to use the system and serve the public?
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. So you went back to the branch and started working?
- 5 A. Yes

- 6 Q. What was that like? What was work like?
- 7 A. Everybody seemed friendly. I was the youngest there,
- 8 so I had -- I kind of felt that everybody above me
 - was, sort of, babying me, just, you know, looking
- 10 after me, taking me under their wing. Everybody
- 11 seemed nice. But it was quite relaxed. It wasn't --
- there were a few things I'd noticed that I didn't
- agree with, things that were happening but, other than
- 14 that, it was fine.
- 15 $\,$ Q. Did there come a time when you noticed some problems,
- 16 some shortfalls?
- 17 **A.** Yes. There were a few times where I'd notice some
- 18 shortfalls where I'd had some shortfalls on my till.
- 19 It was brought to my branch manager's attention. At
- 20 that stage, I was told to balance the till and then
- 21 they would rectify themselves. And it was just --
- 22 they were minor. They weren't anything drastic.
- 23 **Q.** So how long after you started was the first shortfall
- 24 that you noticed?
- 25 **A.** Off the top of my head, I can't honestly remember that

10

- 1 from --
- 2 Q. Okay. So you joined in 2001; is that right?
- 3 A. Yes. Yes, that would -- no, two thousand ... I can't
- 4 honestly remember the dates, no. The dates -- I can't remember the dates, off the top of my head.
- 6 Q. So you noticed shortfalls; were they very much money to start with?
- 8 A. No, they were a few hundred pounds here and there.
- 9 There wasn't anything drastic until, obviously, we'd
- noticed -- well, when I was away they noticed the
 large amounts.
- 12 Q. In an account that I think you've given to Mr Wallis
- that we see in his book, it said that one day you
- found yourself with a small deficit that your manager was not in the least bit concerned with.
- 16 **A.** No, no, there was never any -- there was never any
- 17 concern by anybody. You were made to feel that, you 18 know, it was okay, it will rectify itself.
- 19 Q. After that first shortfall, were there any more20 immediately or did things go back to normal?
- 21 A. I can't remember exactly how long it was but there
- 22 were -- there was a time when there were other
- 23 shortfalls, whether it would be -- it would show up in
- 24 the stamps, it would show up in car tax, things like
- 25 that. So there were a couple of times but, again, you

- approach your branch manager, you explain what the problem is, you're told that it will be rectified.
- 3 Q. The book suggests that you noticed another spate of
- 4 discrepancies with cash adding up at the end of the
 - week to a £1,300 loss. Do you remember that incident?
- 6 A. Yes. That was -- again, I'd given it to the branch
- 7 manager and actually told them, you know, said what
- 8 had happened, spoke to them about it and they said it
- 9 will rectify itself.
- 10 Q. It's suggested that the branch manager took over the11 terminal when that happened.
- 12 **A.** Yes

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- 13 Q. What do you -- when you told Mr Wallis that, what did
- you mean by that, they "took over the terminal"?
- 15 **A.** So, basically, the branch manager would go on under my
- name, under my number, and she would cash up the till.
- 17 **Q.** Did they do that on this occasion, the £1,300
- 18 incident?
- 19 A. Yes.
- 20 **Q.** Did the £1,300 still show as a shortfall after she had
- 21 taken over the terminal?
- 22 A. No, the till then balanced.
- 23 Q. Sorry, it balanced, did it?
- 24 A. (The witness nodded)
- 25 Q. So I think there came a time when a much larger

- 1 shortfall was noticed, yes. Some £11,500-odd?
- 2 A. Yes
- Q. Can you tell us what happened immediately before then.Were you in the branch or not?
- 5 A. No, I was not.
- 6 Q. Where had you gone?
- 7 A. I was on holiday with my family. I'd come back from
- 8 holiday and I was immediately -- the branch manager
- 9 came to me and said there'd been a shortfall in my
- 10 till that somebody else had used and that it needed to
- 11 be rectified. I needed to have a look at it. So, as
- 12 requested by the manager, I'd gone in and cashed
- that -- cashed up the till to find that £11,503.28
- 14 discrepancy myself.
- 15 Q. So what was said to you was shown by your own work to16 be true, there was that discrepancy.
- 17 A. Yes.
- 18 **Q.** What did you think when such a large sum of money was shown as missing?
- 20 **A.** I was totally baffled. I couldn't understand where that that come from, I couldn't explain where that
- 22 discrepancy was. Again, it was very relaxed, the
- 23 branch manager said, you know "We'll sort it out, it's
- 24 not a problem, we'll find out". And I was allowed to
- go back on the till to carry on. We had balanced the

- 1 till and we carried on.
- 2 **Q.** But did a couple of weeks later something different
- 3 happen to cause matters to take a different course?
- 4 A. Yes.

9

- 5 **Q.** What was that?
- 6 A. So I'd come into work and I'd been -- again, I'd got
 - everything out, ready to start the day. I'd been
- 8 pulled to one side by the manager and said that
 - somebody was coming in to interview me today about the
- 10 discrepancy, which was absolutely fine. I had two
- 11 guys come in and question me. They asked at the time
- 12 whether I needed legal representation. I declined.
- 13 I had nothing to hide and it kind of escalated from
- 14 there
- 15 **Q.** So these two guys, where were they from?
- 16 A. They were the Post Office investigators.
- 17 **Q.** Were they local or did they come from --
- 18 A. I can't --
- 19 **Q.** You don't know?
- 20 A. I can't honestly remember. I just -- you know,
- 21 I can't remember that.
- 22 Q. What did they ask you and what did you say?
- 23 A. They asked me where the money had gone, what I'd done
- 24 with the money. Never at any stage was it, "What do
- you think has happened, was there any reason for this
 - 14

- 1 to happen?" It was very much I was being asked
- 2 constantly what have I done with the money, "Where has
- 3 the money gone?" I was being accused from day dot.
- 4 Q. What did you say?
- 5 A. There wasn't much I could say, apart from that I don't
- 6 know where the money's gone, I don't have the money.
- 7 How do you explain something if you don't understand
- 8 it yourself?
- 9 Q. Did something else then happen involving the
- 10 Post Office a little while after the interview with
- 11 the two Post Office employees?
- 12 A. Yes. So then I was put on leave. I was asked to
- 13 leave the Post Office. I was suspended while there
- 14 was further investigation, I was told, taking place.
- 15 And then it was a few weeks after at -- it was --
- 16 I can't even remember the time, really early in the
- 17 morning. I was staying at my mother-in-law's and the
- door -- I wasn't actually there but I had a call. I'd
- gone out early that day with some friends and the
- 20 Post Office investigators were at my mother-in-law's
- 21 door with two police officers to take me to the local
- police station to interview me.
- 23 Q. Which was Peckham, I think, wasn't it?
- 24 A. Yes, Peckham police station, yes.
- 25 **Q.** Were you taken to Peckham police station? 15

- A. I wasn't there at the time but I gladly went to
- Peckham police station of my own accord and, at this
- 3 stage, I then asked for legal representation because,
- 4 obviously, going to a police station is -- you know,
- 5 I thought "This is serious now".
- 6 Q. It had escalated?
- 7 A. It had, yes -- very quickly.
- 8 Q. Can you remember -- were you interviewed at the police
- 9 station?
- 10 **A.** I was.

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- 11 **Q.** I don't think you were arrested, were you?
- 12 A. No, I weren't, no.
- 13 **Q.** You were interviewed under caution voluntarily?
- 14 A. Yes. I was interviewed. The police had nothing to do
- 15 with this. I was interviewed by the same two
- 16 investigating officers from the Post Office.
- 17 **Q.** By the same two, you mean the ones from a few weeks
- 18 before?
- 19 **A.** The ones from the previous interview, yes.
- 20 Q. What was the interview like?
- 21 A. It was horrendous. The only way I can explain it is
- 22 that I felt bullied. There was no -- I was a young
- 23 girl. I was in a police station. I couldn't justify
- 24 where this money had gone because I didn't know where
- 25 the money had gone. I couldn't explain anything and

- 1 I was just constantly being asked, "Did you pay for
- 2 your family to go on holiday? What did you spend the
- 3 money on?" And it just kept going and then, in the
- 4 end, my solicitor said, "Just say 'no comment"
- 5 because they're not asking questions, they're just
- 6 interrogating me.
- 7 Q. When the Court of Appeal came to look at the matter
- 8 all those years later in April 2021 in its judgment,
- 9 the Court of Appeal records that your record of
- 10 interview says that you were asked questions
- 11 including, "Can you demonstrate how you did not steal
- the money?"
- 13 A. Yes.
- 14 Q. Do you remember those kind of questions?
- 15 **A.** Yes.
- 16 Q. You were asked whether you could satisfy the officers
- that you didn't have responsibility for the £11,000
- that was said to be missing?
- 19 **A.** Yes
- 20 Q. So you were being asked to prove how you had not
- 21 committed a crime?
- 22 A. Yes
- 23 Q. Is that how the interview went?
- 24 A. Yes, yes, very much so. They had access to my bank
- 25 accounts. They had access to my home. They never,

- 1 ever came to my home or searched my home but they
 - looked through all the bank accounts. There was no
- 3 money to find because there was no money there.
- 4 Q. You said they were interested in the holiday. That
- 5 was, I think, your parent's 15th wedding
- 6 anniversary --
- 7 A. Yes, it was.
- 8 Q. -- and it was a family holiday to the Dominican
- 9 Republic; is that right?
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 **Q.** But they asked you questions about that?
- 12 A. They didn't ask me questions. They accused me of
- paying for everybody to go, but that wasn't correct.
- 14 If they'd have looked into that, they would have seen
- 15 that everybody paid their own -- for their own
- 16 holiday.
- 17 Q. Were you -- did your suspension continue?
- 18 A. Yes, and then I was sacked by the Post Office and then
- 19 prosecuted.
- 20 **Q.** Can you remember the offences for which you were
- 21 prosecuted?
- 22 A. Yes, I can.
- 23 **Q.** What were they?
- 24 A. Two counts of false accounting and theft.
- 25 Q. Did something happen when you were charged with those,
 - 18

- 1 concerning your health?
- 2 **A.** Yes.
- 3 Q. Do you mind me asking about it?
- 4 A. No, it's fine.
- 5 Q. You tell us what happened.
- 6 A. I tried to kill myself.
- 8 offence you hadn't committed?
- 9 A. Yes, it was. I couldn't defend myself. I couldn't
- 10 explain what had happened.
- 11 **Q.** How many times did you try?
- 12 **A.** Twice.
- 13 Q. Was that through taking overdoses?
- 14 **A.** Yes, it was.
- 15 **Q.** You weren't successful in your attempts.
- 16 **A.** No.
- 17 **Q.** Was there a consequence of that, though, in terms of
- what care you had to receive?
- 19 **A.** Yes, I wasn't trusted by my family to be left alone.
- It had a huge impact on everything, to be fair.
 I missed -- I'd missed a family -- a really close
- 22 family -- sorry, a really close friend's wedding.
- 23 I had to go to the church and then, in the evening, if
- 24 I hadn't have gone to -- my family had sectioned me.
- 25 Q. Were you admitted to a secure psychiatric facility?

- 1 A. Yes, I was.
- 2 Q. Was that the unit at the Princess Royal Hospital in
- 3 Bromley?
- 4 A. Yes, it was.
- 5 Q. How long were you kept in the secure unit?
- 6 A. I can't remember. It was -- I don't know whether it
- 7 was a few days or a week. I can't honestly remember
- 8 but it wasn't pleasant.
- 9 Q. Were you given psychotherapy treatment?
- 10 **A.** Yes, I was and a lot of medication.
- 11 Q. Before this, had you been on medication?
- 12 A. I had been on medication for low mood, anxiety and
- just the whole general process that I'd gone through.
- 14 But, yeah, the medication started to be upped.
- 15 **Q.** So that would be prescribed medication before the
 - suicide attempts --
- 17 **A.** Yes

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22

- 18 Q. -- and then it was upped when you were in the secure
- 19 facility?
- 20 **A.** Yes
- 21 Q. Did the treatment that you received, in particular the
 - psychotherapy, eventually work, enough to get you out?
- 23 A. Yes, enough to get me home but, again, I was -- you
- 24 know, my family watched but we were still going
- 25 through this cycle of prosecution from the Post Office

- 1 at this stage.
- 2 Q. So you had to attend the Magistrates' Court; is that
- 3 right?
- 4 A. Yes, I did.
- 5 Q. Did you plead guilty or not guilty?
- 6 A. Not guilty
- 7 Q. Was the case sent off to the Kingston Crown Court?
- 8 A. Yes, it was
- 9 **Q.** What happened at the trial?
- 10 A. At the trial I tried to defend myself, as much as
- 11 I possibly could. It was very much from day 1 that
- 12 the Post Office were adamant that I'd taken the money
- and there was no -- you weren't given an opportunity
- 14 to explain or even try and explain how something could
- 15 have gone wrong or -- you just had no idea.
- 16 I remember, actually, since our convictions were 17 overturned last year, a forensic accountant actually
- got in touch, who was actually hired at my trial to come to give a forensic account of my case at the
- 20 court. He was never called up but he came forward
- 21 last year to say that, actually, when -- he had some
- 22 disquiet about my case at that time. He sat in a room
- 23 with Fujitsu and the Post Office and had asked for
- 24 certain documentation to be provided. He was then
- 25 told that that would cost £20,000 around about.

- 1 Q. It would cost who £20,000?
- 2 A. It would cost us, me, my legal team, £20,000 to get
- 3 that documentation. We would have to pay the
- 4 Post Office and Fujitsu to get that documentation and
- 5 that wasn't possible. That only came to light to
- 6 me -- that was only brought to my attention last year
- 7 when Mr Turner came forward.
- 8 Q. What was his full name?
- 9 A. Michael Turner.
- 10 **Q.** Can you remember why he wasn't called at your trial?
- 11 A. No. He said that he was very surprised when he heard
- 12 that -- from the evidence that was submitted that I'd
- 13 been found guilty.
- 14 Q. What was your defence?
- 15 A. There wasn't much of a defence. I didn't steal the
- 16 money. It was -- how can you prove that, you know,
- that you haven't stolen anything but, at the same
 - time, I hadn't been investigated as to where there was
- 19 any money. No money was found.
- 20 Q. At that stage, was there any examination of the way
- 21 the Horizon system worked in the course of your trial?
- 22 A. No.

- 23 Q. Did you know, at that stage, that there was
- 24 a potential issue with the reliability of how the
- 25 Horizon system worked?

22

- 1 **A.** No.
- 2 Q. Was there any evidence called about how the Horizon
- 3 system worked, in your trial?
- 4 **A.** No.
- 5 **Q.** I think you were found guilty by a majority?
- 6 **A.** Yes
- 7 Q. Were you sentenced immediately or was it put off to another day?
- 9 **A.** No, I was allowed home and I was to be sentenced after a psychiatric report.
- 11 **Q.** Was a psychiatric report or reports prepared?
- 12 A. It hadn't been prepared. We went to the Magistrates'
- 13 Court for sentencing and the judge then asked again
- for that to be done.
- 15 Q. To the Crown Court or the Magistrates' Court?
- 16 A. It was Guildford Magistrates' Court, I think it was,
- for sentencing and then two weeks later we had to go
- 18 back again.
- 19 **Q.** Okay.
- 20 A. And that's when I was sentenced.
- 21 Q. Did you know that you were going to be sent to prison?
- 22 A. I had an idea. I was told by my legal team that it
- 23 was a possibility but, at the same time, my family had
- 24 been told that if they were to pay the £11,500 back to
- 25 the Post Office that I wouldn't get a custodial

- 1 sentence.
- 2 Q. So what happened in the period between being convicted
- and sentenced, so far as the £11,500 was concerned?
- 4 A. So my family paid the £11,500 and it was -- we're not
- 5 from a family of money, so it was paid from a number
- 6 of family members clubbing together.
- 7 Q. Did that include your, I think then, fiancé?
- 8 A. Yes. Not my fiancé, it was my mother-in-law.
- 9 **Q.** Ah, I see.

22

- 10 **A.** My grandmother, my uncle, my parents had to club
- together to get the £11,500 to pay the Post Office,
- which they paid, which I was really angry about.
- 13 **Q.** Why were you angry?
- 14 A. Because I hadn't stolen any money so why am I paying
- 15 for something that I haven't stolen?
- 16 **Q.** They paid the money and it was handed over to the
- 17 Post Office and accepted?
- 18 **A.** It was. And then the day of sentencing, the judge
- 19 accused me of stealing from old age pensioners.
- 20 Q. Was this in the judge's sentencing remarks?
- 21 A. Yes, yes. I'd stolen from old age pensioners and
 - that, because I showed no remorse, I wouldn't say
- 23 sorry, I was sentenced to six months in prison.
- 24 Q. Were you asked to apologise?
- 25 A. Yes, and I refused to apologise for something I hadn't

- 1 done.
- 2 Q. Were you escorted from court in handcuffs?
- 3 A. I was.
- 4 Q. Where were you taken?
- 5 A. I was taken down to the holding cells and I was
- 6 actually placed in a room downstairs and then I was
- 7 allowed to see my barrister -- that was it -- who
- 8 brought a note down from my family, and then I was
- 9 taken to Holloway prison.
- 10 Q. This may sound like a really odd question: what was 11 Holloway prison like?
- 12 A. Your worst nightmare. It was horrible. It wasn't
- a place for a young girl. 14 Q. Just remind us how old you were?
- 15 A. 19. I was a teenager.
- 16 Q. Why was it horrible?
- 17 A. Because I shouldn't have been there. I hadn't done
- 18 anything wrong. There were things that I saw,
- 19 I experienced, that nobody should go through.
- 20 Q. One of your duties was to deliver hot drinks around 21 the wings; is that right?
- 22 A.

- 23 Q. Was there an occasion where you saw something
- 24 particularly horrific? 25 A. Yes, there was. I saw a young girl hanging in the

1 cell

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- 2 Again, this may seem like a really odd question, but
- 3 how did the experience of, I think, three months in
 - Holloway, you spent in the end, affect your mental
- 5
- 6 Α. It hasn't stopped. I have intense therapy to try and
 - get over what I've been through, to deal with the
- 8 stresses, the feelings, the flashbacks, the dreams,
- 9 the nightmares.
- 10 Q. In the 20-odd years since your release, has it
- 11 continued, i.e. being accused of a crime, convicted of
- 12 a crime that you didn't commit and being sent to
- 13 prison for six months continue to affect your mental
- 15 Yes, it has, and I think it will always affect me. Α.
- 16 Q. Can you help us about any other affects it had on you?
- 17 Did there come a time when you moved house?
- 18 A. I moved when my first son was born. I'd not -- well, 19
- I'd come out of prison and my son had been --
- 20 I couldn't get a job and then I'd got a job.
- 21 Just stop there. Sorry to interrupt your flow. Q.
- 22 A. It's okay.
- 23 Q. Did the conviction that you had, for offences of
- 24 dishonesty, affect your ability to get a job?
- 25 A. Yes, definitely.

- 1 Q. Again, it's really obvious, but why?
- 2 A. Yeah, no, I used to have to sign on. I used to --
- 3 obviously, when I came out of Holloway I was on tag
- 4 for three months, so I had a large tag round my ankle.
- 5 **Q.** You had an ankle bracelet for an electronic tag?
- 6 A. Yes, I did, and I was on a curfew from 7.00 'til 7.00,
- 7 so I was allowed up from 7.00 in the morning until 8
- 7.00 in the evening. But when I went to sign on --
- 9 because I had no job, I'd just come out of prison, 10 nobody wants to employ you. You've got a criminal
- 11 record and you've got a tag on your leg. You've been
- 12 accused of false accounting and theft. Nobody wants
- 13 to employ you.
- 14 Q. So did you struggle to get employment?
- 15 A. I did, when I first came out. And then I found that
- 16 every time I went for a job I had to explain why I had
- a criminal record and what this was doing on here and 17
- 18 every time I had to explain my side of the story.
- 19 Q. Were you still saying you were innocent?
- 20 Yes, because I was innocent. And if the people got to
- 21 know me and take a chance on me, then they would know
- 22 the kind of person that I am, and quite a few people
- 23 did. There were companies that didn't and turned me
- 24 away but there were companies that did believe what
- 25 I was saying and actually look at it and think, "This

- girl hasn't done anything, how could she possibly?" 1
- 2 Did you get work eventually?
- 3 Eventually, but it still -- it was still the stigma of
- 4 having a criminal record and people knew. So then you
 - are anxious of stuff that you do, I worked in a shop.
- 6 I worked in Mothercare. I used to have a weekend job
- 7 in Mothercare when the children were growing up, but
- 8 I would never cash up the till because I was afraid.
- 9 I would never -- and if I had to cash up the till, I'd
- 10 make sure that somebody was stood there with me to
- 11 check what I was doing and to double-check that, you
- 12 know, nothing was wrong, because I was so paranoid and
- 13 scared that something would go wrong and I couldn't
- 14 feel like that again. I couldn't be put through that
- 15
- 16 I've taken you down a little side route. We were
- 17 talking about moving house.
- 18 Α. Yes.
- 19 Why did you move house?
- 20 I moved house to get away from the stigma and just
- 21 people knowing, people being horrible. I just wanted
- 22 a fresh start where nobody knew me.
- 23 Where did you move?
- I moved to Buckinghamshire with my fiancé, at the 24 A.
- 25 time, and my first-born son, and nobody knew. Nobody

- 1 knew what I'd been through. Nobody knew that I'd been 2 to prison. I never divulged anything to anybody.
- 3 Q. So did you live in Buckinghamshire a life that was 4 largely free of what had happened back in London?
- 5 A. For a bit.

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- 6 Q. Then what happened?
- 7 A. And then I went on holiday with my family and 8 I remember my Dad phoning me one night saying, "You 9 need to investigate this, I've just seen something on 10 the TV with Lord Arbuthnot saying that, you know, 11 there's a problem with the Post Office system".

At that stage, I was abroad, and I remember getting up in the morning and we had no Wi-fi access where we were, so we literally went and got Wi-fi access in a local -- near a local café to investigate this and then, from then on, it came to light that from when we were told before that, you know, "This doesn't happen all the time in the Post Office, you've stolen the money", actually, a lot of people had come forward and you weren't the only one.

- 21 Q. Was that the first time that you knew about other people having problems with the Post Office in this 22 23 way?
- 24 A. It was the first time that I knew that other people 25 had been accused of a crime they hadn't committed by

- 1 the same company.
- 2 So what did you do as a result?
- 3 At that stage, when I got home, the first thing I did 4
- was I got in touch with my previous solicitors that 5 I had at the time of my trial, trying to get any
- 6 documentation that I possibly could from them, which
- 7 I found very difficult because it had been so long.
- 8 Can you remember when this was, roughly?
- 9 A. Maybe 2014/2015.
- 10 Q. Okav.

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- 11 And then that's when I found out that there was
- 12 a group, the JFSA, and, obviously, then I joined the
- 13 group and went along to the meetings and it escalated
- 14 from there.
- 15 What did you do with the JFSA? Q.
- 16 With the JFSA we had meetings, I spoke. You know,
- 17 I was really surprised at the time of how many people
- 18 had been through the same thing. Our stories were
- 19 very, very similar, the process of how things were
- 20 done was very, very similar and then, at that stage,
- 21 I then obviously knew that there was going to be --
- 22 you know, that I had to -- well, at that stage, I had
 - to tell my children, because I had post coming through
- 24 the door from JFSA, post coming through from the
- 25 mediation scheme, that I'd obviously been -- well, I'd

- 1 asked to be part of and --
 - Q. Just hold that thought, I'm going to come back to the mediation scheme in a moment.

You said that you had to tell your children. Do I take from that that you hadn't told them that --

- A. I hadn't told anybody where I lived. Nobody knew. I got worried that my children would go to school and that they would be picked on that, you know, their Mum was classed as a criminal, that I had a criminal record and I'd been to prison.
 - So I made sure that it came from me. I had to tell them. I didn't want anybody else to tell them what had happened.
- 14 Q. Back to the mediation scheme. Tell us about how that 15 came about.
- 16 A. So I don't really remember too much about the 17 mediation scheme, apart from that I'd put the 18 application through to go through the mediation scheme 19 and then I received a letter back from Sir Anthony 20 Hooper to say that my case wasn't being taken through, 21 through the mediation scheme.
- 22 Q. Did he explain why?
- 23 A. I don't remember. I may have the letter somewhere or 24 my solicitors may have the letter but I can't honestly 25 remember why but it just said that it wasn't -- my

- 1 case wasn't -- had been rejected for the mediation 2 scheme.
- 3 Q. In Mr Wallis's book it describes this as feeling like 4 a yet further insult.
- 5 A. Definitely. I just didn't know how -- the only way to
- 6 explain it is you just don't know how to defend
- 7 yourself. How can you -- you know, you're trying to
- 8 everything. Still, to that day, I was still pleading
- 9 my innocence but it -- to me, it just seemed like the
- 10 mediation scheme was pointless and they weren't going 11 to listen to anybody.
- 12 Q. Did this have any effect on your health, i.e. this new 13 incident?
- 14 Yes. Obviously, I'd learnt to, kind of, bury A.
- 15 everything and live with the fact that I had
- 16 a criminal record, which in an area that I lived in
- 17 nobody knew at the time.
- 18 So like suppression?
- 19 Yes, literally, I just buried everything, feelings.
- 20 I never spoke about prison, I never spoke about
- 21 anything. So this was opening a can of worms. For
- 22 me, it was opening up all those feelings and those
- 23 memories again.
- 24 Q. Did it cause a deterioration in your mental health 25 again?

A. Yes, it did. I was back on tablets. And then I'd got 1 2 married in 2008 and then 2015 I got divorced and 3 that -- I'm not saying that that -- wholly that the 4 Post Office are to blame for that, because they're 5 not, but it had an impact on my mental health and the 6 way I saw things and the way I reacted. It had an 7 impact on my marriage then. 8 Winding forwards to 2021, your conviction was quashed 9 by the Court of Appeal on two grounds. Looking back 10 over that 20-year period between conviction, which 11 I think was in 2002, to April 2021, that nearly 12 20-year period of your life, what was it like to live 13 14 A. It was horrible. In the space of 20 minutes I had 15 three judges saying that 20 years of my life, 16 basically, was erased. It was for nothing. I'd gone 17 through everything for nothing. I was a child. 18 Q. What would you like to happen now? 19 A. I'd like for somebody to be helped accountable. It's 20 not just one person. There's not just one person that 21 knew what was going on here. Somebody needs to be 22 held accountable. I want them to sit here and feel 23 what we feel. We're having to do this again. We're

having to tell our stories, over and over.

Do they have children? How would they feel if

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1 it was their daughter? My 15-year old son said to me 2 last week that he's glad that he doesn't have the same 3 surname as me. He sits in school and, you know, he 4 hears people talking, he sees stuff in his school, 5 they have TVs that project the news. He's happy that 6 he doesn't have the same surname as me. 7 Ms Felstead, I've asked you lots of questions. Is 8 there anything that you want to say to the Chair of 9 the Inquiry that we haven't looked at, so far? 10 No. We just need answers, just so we can move on with 11 12 Q. Thank you very much for giving your evidence to the 13 Chair today. 14 Sir, I don't know whether you have any questions 15 of Ms Felstead? SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, I don't have any guestions. 16 17 Ms Felstead, but I just do want to say one or two 18 things to you. 19 As is obvious, you are one of the people whose 20 story is perhaps better known than some of your 21 colleagues and it might, therefore, have been tempting 22 for you to say, "Well, people know about me, I don't 23 want to engage with this Inquiry". But I'm so

1 A. Thank you. 2 MR BEER: Sir, thank you. I wonder whether we might take 3 a ten-minute break now, just whilst we reorganise and 4 get Ms Misra ready to give evidence. 5 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Of course. 6 MR BEER: Thank you very much, sir. 7 (11.10 am) 8 (A short break) 9 (11.25 am) 10 MR BEER: Sir, may I call Mrs Seema Misra, please. 11 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, of course. 12 SEEMA MISRA (affirmed) 13 Examined by MR BEER 14 MR BEER: Mrs Misra, can you please tell us your full 15 name? A. Seema Misra. 16 17 Q. How old are you now? 18 A. 46. 19

Q. I think in front of you there should be a witness 20 statement in your name; is that right? A. Correct. 22 Q. Is it dated 17 February this year? 23 A. It is, yes. 24 Q. If you look at the last page of it, do you see your 25 signature? 35

Yes. 1 Α.

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2 Q. Are the contents of it true to the best of your

is extremely important; so thank you.

grateful that you have. To hear it directly from you

3 knowledge and belief?

4 Yes, yes they are. Α.

5 Q. I think you are married; is that right?

6 A.

7 Is your husband with you today? Q.

8 Α.

9 Q. What is your husband's name?

10 A. Davinder Misra.

11 Q. Do you have children?

12 A. Two kids.

13 Q. How old are they?

14 21 and 10.

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Q. Okay. I think there came a time when you joined the 15

Post Office; is that right?

17 A. (The witness nodded)

18 Q. Can you remember when that was?

19 A. Yes, 2005.

20 What did you do before you joined the Post Office?

21 A. Since the year 2000, me and my husband been running

22 various businesses, so we had a shop before, which was

23 doing very well.

24 Whereabouts was that shop? Q.

25 Α. It was in Luton.

- Q. In Caddington, I think, is that right? A village 1 2 outside Luton?
- 3 Correct, between Luton and Dunstable, yes. A.
- 4 Q. That wasn't a Post Office?
- 5 No, no, no, it was just a shop floor.
- 6 So how did it come about that you started to work for 7 the Post Office?
- 8 Me and my husband always been business minded, so we
- 9 had a shop, we done really well. It was like the
- 10 first retail outlet we did and said, "Definitely, it's
- 11 a good business to be in" and we had quite a good
- 12 equity in the business, we wanted to expand, like
- 13 normally business people do.

14 So we were looking around for an opportunity to, 15 you know -- like, to expand for the bigger shop front 16 and everything. So that's how we came cross this West 17 Byfleet shop and the Post Office opportunity.

- 18 Q. Can I just ask you to slow down.
- 19 A.
- 20 Q. I know there's a lot that you want to say and there's 21 a lot I want to ask you.
- 22 A. Everybody says, yes. That's fine.
- 23 Q. But, obviously, the Chairman is listening from Wales
- 24 and somebody's got to transcribe this afterwards?
- 25 A. Sure.

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- 1 So best slow it down a bit.
 - So I think you said West Byfleet Post Office.
- 3 Yes. Α.

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- 4 Q. Where's West Byfleet?
- 5 In Surrey. Α.
- 6 How did it come about that, you are, sort of, north of
 - Watford one moment, in Luton, and now you're looking
- 8 in West Byfleet? How did that come about?
- 9 We came from India and there it doesn't matter where
- 10 the opportunity is, so we moved. We lived in central
- 11 London, then the opportunity came in Caddington, we
- 12 moved there. Then we saw an opportunity in
- 13 West Byfleet. It was advertised in one of the papers
- 14 or something -- I can't remember. It was (unclear) we 15
- 16 Q. What kind of Post Office was the West Byfleet
- 17 Post Office?
- 18 Very busy, three counter Post Office. A.
- 19 Did it have a shop with it?
- 20 Yes, massive shop, like a supermarket.
- 21 Q. Okay. When you took over the Post Office, what was
- 22 your role in it?
- 23 A. I was subpostmistress.
- 24 So you were on the documents as the postmistress? Q.
- 25 Correct.

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- 1 Q. What was your husband's role?
- 2 A. He's managing shop.
- 3 **Q.** Who else worked in the branch?
- 4 A. We had a staff, which we took over from the previous
- 5 subpostmaster as well.
- 7 There were like one person and then we had employed 8 two more.
- 9 Q. So three, other than you and Mr Misra?

Q. How many staff were there?

10 A. Correct, yes.

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- 11 Q. Did you and your husband have to invest money in the
- 12 business in order to take it over?
- 13 A. Correct. We had a huge equity, I think it was about
- 109 or 107,000 from our previous business. 14
- 15 Q. The Caddington one?
- 16 A. In Caddington one, which we invested into the
- 17 West Byfleet. We had a house in London, which was
- 18 a buy-to-let as well.
- 19 Q. You said you had a house in London. Did you invest 20 some of the equity of that in the Post Office?
- 21 A. No, no. Before coming to the Post Office, our
- 22 portfolio for was very big, so we had a flat in
- 23 London, which was buy-to-let, always been buy-to-let,
- 24 we invested money in the Post Office and a shop, and
- 25 no loans, no nothing.

- Did you have to take a mortgage out, as well?
- 2 A.

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- 3 Q. I think I read somewhere that there was a £67,000
- 4 mortgage?
- 5 A. Correct, yes.
- 6 Q. So what was the total investment to take over the
- 7 Post Office?
- 8 A. It was well over 200. It was around about
- 9 200-something and then the stock on top. It was well
- 10 over 200.
- 11 Q. By that, £200,000, you mean?
- 12 Α. Correct.
- 13 What were the benefits, as you saw them, of taking
- 14 over a post office?
- 15 A. We saw the shop front, because me and Davinder always
- 16 will be running shop before and we saw it's a
- 17 profitable business and we saw suddenly, like, yeah,
- 18 definitely we can do quite a lot, take the takings up
- 19 and everything. And the Post Office, being the centre
- 20 of community, it was really good that, you know, it's
- 21 like serving community. We always believe in running
- 22 charities and everything, and we saw "Wow, working for
- 23 a Post Office, we'll get chance to serve community".
- 24 I think there was a salary as well? Q.
- 25 A. It was, yes.

- 1 **Q.** £60,000, is that right?
- 2 A. Yes, to start with. When I took over, it was just 3 under 60,000, but then I took it up to nearly 80.
- 4 Q. Was that something, winding forward a number of years, 5 that you lost?
- 6 Α. Yes.
- 7 Q. When you first started to work in the Post Office, was 8 the Horizon system already in use?
- 9 A. Yes, it was.
- 10 Q. Had you ever used Horizon before you arrived in 2005 11 at West Byfleet?
- 12 A. No. In March 2005, I had a training and then in June 13 I took over the Post Office. I did ask that I had my
- 14 training in March and there's, like, a gap. When you
- 15 are buying and selling, there can be, like, delays so
- 16 I did ask, "Is it okay because it's three-month gap
- 17 since I had my training and going into the branch".
- 18 They said, "No, no, it will be fine. You will have
- 19 two trainers".
- 20 Q. Okay. Where was the training?
- 21 A. It was somewhere in London. It was, like -- I can't
- 22 remember exactly but I was coming from Luton by train
- 23 to London somewhere.
- 24 Q. So it wasn't in the branch?
- 25 A. It wasn't in the branch, no.

- 1 Q. How long did that training last?
- 2 A. It was two weeks. It was supposed to be two weeks, 3 full day, but we normally used to finish by lunch.
- 4 Q. Did that relate to all aspects of running
- 5 a post office?
- 6 Α. No, it was mostly cross-selling. So if somebody
- 7 coming for, like, a DVLA, how can we promote the extra
- 8 products and everything. If somebody did Recorded
- 9 Delivery, how can we tell them the benefit of a
- 10 Special Delivery and all that.
- 11 **Q.** Did the training include training on using the Horizon 12 system?
- 13 A. Probably just can't remember. Probably, just the
- 14 basic like the stamps and all that but, no, it wasn't
 - like a proper, proper one.
- 16 Q. Did you get any on-site training back at the
 - Post Office after you took it over on Horizon?
- 18 A. Yes. Not training, training -- the trainer was there,
- 19 so just watching us, what we do and everything, and
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- 21 Q. Did something happen when you were having that on-site
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- 23 A. Yes. Very first day, when -- 29 June 2005, when
- 24 I took over, that was the first day. But the first
- 25 one in there I'm pretty sure was 30 June. And I had

- 1 a trainer Janade was there.
- 2 Q. Who's Janade?

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- 3 A. My trainer. He was there, he introduced himself
- 4 before when we opened the Post Office, and running the
 - counters, he was there. Everything was just standing
- 6 behind and, in the evening, he like -- he's like, "We
- 7 need to cash up". I said, "Okay, that's fine". We
- 8 cash up and we were around about, under £100, I think
- 9 it was around about £80-something, under £100 short. 10 And I say, like, "Why there's a shortfall?" And his
- 11 exact wording, "Oh, you just had an audit yesterday,
- 12 it's never penny to penny".
 - And I was thinking, I had experience of running a shop, I worked in city and I said, "Why wouldn't be penny to penny?" And he said, "Now you have to make sure that tills are good." So he said, like,
- 17 I now have to put my own money from the shopfloor or 18 from own personal money back into the Post Office
- 19 till, which I did.
- 20 Q. So had the trainer been watching you conduct 21 transactions?
- 22 A. Yes
- 23 Despite that, there was a shortfall being shown? Q.
- 24 A. Yes.
- 25 Q. So what was done about that?

- 1 So I went to the shopfloor. I got cash from the till 2 and put it in the Post Office till.
- 3 Q. So you made it up from money from the shop side?
- 4 A. Yes.

- Q. What did the trainer say about that?
- 6 A. Nothing. He said to me -- it was -- his excuse was,
- 7 like, "After audit, it's never penny to penny". That 8 was his excuse.
- 9 **Q.** Did there come a time when the trainer rang the 10 helpline?
- 11 A. Yes. So the first week trainer, he was -- he was
- 12 there but, like, when the shortfalls were there and
- 13
- everything he said, "Oh, and on Wednesday when you do 14 rollover, it will balance up". And on Wednesday when
- 15 I do rollover, I have to put again money from the shop
- 16 counter and he was just gone, nothing -- nothing said.
- 17 But then when the next trainer came, Michael,
- 18 the second week, and he asked me, "Congratulations,
- 19 how is it going and everything"? I said -- you know,
- 20 I told him what had been happening from the first day
- 21 until the balancing. He was concerned. He said, "Oh
- 22 that shouldn't happen". He was concerned. He said,
- 23 "Let's see how it goes".
- 24 He was there, like Janade, but he was paying 25 more attention to each and every transaction we do and

- 1 everything and on Wednesday he was there with the 2 balancing and all that, and there was a shortfall. It 3 was in hundreds -- I think a couple of hundred pounds. 4 He called the helpline said he had been here whole 5 week watching each and every transaction, me doing it 6 correctly, but still there's a shortfall. So the 7 helpline asked him to do some procedure on the system 8 and the figure doubled up. 9 Q. Just tell us that last bit again. He was getting some 10 instructions down the phoneline from the helpline? 11 12 **Q.** They said to do something with the system? 13 A. Correct. 14 **Q.** And that caused the shortfall to double? A. Double. 15 16 **Q.** So what happened with the doubled shortfall? 17 18
- Q. So what happened with the doubled shortfall?
 A. Nothing. He said, like, you know, "Just keep an eye".
 I can't remember exactly how was it dealt with but he said, "Keep an eye, if there's any issues there's
 a helpline number, call them up". But he was shocked.
 He said "I can't" -- I ask him can he stay over another week or something. He said he can't, he's supposed to here for one week only.
 Q. So after that, did the shortfalls continue?
- 25 **A.** It continued and I've been told by the helpline that, 45
- 1 you know, "Maybe transaction error correction will 2 come up, then you can take your money out". But, in 3 the meantime, it's my responsibility to make sure 4 tills are good, meant that they should balance. 5 Q. Just winding forwards, we know that you were taken to 6 court. 7 Α. Correct. 8 Q. Can you remember whether there were any documents 9 available about what you just described, i.e. two 10 trainers coming in for a week each, watching you work, 11 as you said, each and every transaction, and there 12 still being shortfalls, and then a second trainer, 13 Michael, doing something by reference to the helpline 14 and it causing the shortfall to double? 15 During my trial 2010, Post Office denied that Michael Α. 16 ever been to my Post Office. They couldn't find 17 Tamiko Springer, my branch manager, area manager, she 18 couldn't get hold -- because I'd been telling her that 19 I'm having shortfalls. They couldn't get hold of any 20 of them. Michael, they completely denied but, later
 - Post Office.
 Q. You mention in your statement something which you
 called a "so-called audit".

on, I think it was 2013 or 2014, we found out from my

Post Office internal memo that Michael had been to my

1 **A.** Yes.

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- Q. Why do you call it a "so-called audit"?
- 3 A. It's just -- I don't know, they're like -- if I take 4 you back in 2005, when I was screaming for help, 5 within a couple of months, I told my area manager 6 I can't run Post Office like that. I say, "I'm losing 7 money. I bought a business to make money not to lose 8 money". And she said -- that's Tamiko Springer, I'm 9 speaking about -- and she said, "Okay, let me speak to 10 my manager, Angela".

And then she came back, same day she came back, told me, "Okay, we'll get the audit done". I said, "Do whatever needs doing but I want to get this sorted". They said, "Okay".

I asked them when they will be coming. They said, "We can't tell any dates because it's going to be surprise", and then after -- I think, within a matter of weeks or something, auditor came in. I was so happy, I welcomed them in. One of them said, "Oh wow, you're very happy to see auditors". I said, "Yeah, you know, I want to get this thing sorted". They made -- they said -- they done the audit and they made another shortfall. Despite of me putting in money regularly, they made a shortfall of around just under £4,000.

Q. Just hold that thought.

2 A. Yes

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Q. Winding back, had there been continuous shortfallsfrom the beginning until now?

5 A. Correct.

Q. Had you been making up the money from takings in theshop?

8 **A.** Yes.

9 Q. Yes, go back to where you were: the audit that wasgoing to be a surprise and you welcomed it.

11 A. Yes, I welcomed them in and I was so happy that it 12 will be all sorted and everything. They were done in 13 a good couple of hours and they told me there's 14 a shortfall of -- I don't know the exact figure but it was just under £4,000 and they asked me how I'm going 15 16 to pay that. I said, "I want to know where the 17 money's going. Why are we losing money?" And he 18 said, "I need to make a phone call".

Then he made a phone called to Elaine Ridge, my area contract manager, and she said, "Oh, well, thankfully they agreed to take this time" -- they agreed to take it out of my salary. But any -- they're like -- how I describe them, they're like -- it's a "so-called audit". They call them like auditor but like a bouncer, you see them. They're like very

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- 1 big. I'm tall as well. They're like bigger than --2 they look down on you big, and they gave -- he gave me 3 warning, that particular auditor gave me warning. He 4 said, "Mrs Misra, any time you are £500 short, we'll 5 take the Post Office away". And that was it.
- 6 Q. Did they take money from your salary?
- 7 A. They did, yes. So, technically, I was still under 8 six months of my probation period, so paying money in 9 and then they deduct money from my salary as well.
- 10 Q. Did this continue, either deductions or you making up 11 the balance?
- 12 A. Yes. They were like -- there are hardly any 13 transaction correction came in my favour. The rest 14 they were like against me. Even like later on, there 15 was a £20,000 for the National Lottery, and all that 16 as well. They took it out of my salary.
- 17 Q. Did there come a time when you were accused of 18 stealing £74,000-odd?
- 19 A. Yes. 80,000 actually.
- 20 Q. Oh, okay?
- 21 **A.** It was 14 January when the auditor came in.
- 22 Q. So that's not the figure that ended up on the 23 indictment, is it?
- 24 A. No, it was -- the day I was told, it's 80,000.
- 25 **Q.** So tell us about that in January.

1 So the auditor came in, I told them there will be 2 a shortfall, they asked me to write it down and they 3 did the audit. They said, "There's a shortfall". 4 They called somebody else as well, investigation team, 5 I think they called as well. They interviewed me. 6 They asked me if I want anybody here. I say, like, 7 "I've got nothing to hide, so it will be all sorted 8 I haven't done anything, so it will be all fine". So 9 they took me, interviewed me, the figure they have 10 been saying, 80,000.

> In the meantime, they asked me if it's okay for a locum to come over and run the Post Office. I said, "Yes, please because, otherwise" -- it's not village, village, but not town either, West Byfleet, so --"otherwise, like the pensioners will have to go to the next town to get to the money and all that. So locum can come and run that's perfectly fine".

When we came down -- so basically we have around about 3,000 square foot shop, and then a three-counter Post Office in the end, and the same space on the first floor as well. So they interviewed me on the first floor. When we came down, they said to me, "Mrs Misra, congratulations, the locum just took over the Post Office and he's £2,000 over". And I said to locum, "Can you please find the rest of the money as

1 well". So from there, 80 to 78, for how come it gone 2 to 74?

- 3 Q. You don't know?
- 4 A. I don't know.

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- 5 Q. When you were interviewed under caution, did you try 6 to explain what had happened?
- 7 A. Yes, that time it's just like they made me -- after my 8 first audit and after going through the individual 9 tills and everything, they made me feel -- Elaine 10 Ridge was the one who told me, "Mrs Misra" -- there's 11 some wording they have like they're hounding you like 12 that. "Mrs Misra, we have so many other Post Office, 13 they are doing fine. It's just your Post Office we're 14 having issue with".

They made me feel that I'm the dumbest person, I don't know how to add one plus one, and my confidence was like rock bottom. In the meantime, we caught some staff stealing money, we got rid of them, but still there was, like, money missing, and all that. I did tell them about the staff but I said, "I haven't taken a single penny". I told them, "I haven't taken a single penny".

23 So in your interview, did you say that one explanation 24 for the losses that you were being shown was staff 25 theft?

Α. Correct.

2 In interview, did you make any admissions yourself? 3 Did you admit to falsifying the figures for the cash 4 on hand and currency awaiting collection?

5 A. Yes, definitely, because I was in complete mess. 6 I didn't know what to do. So there came the point 7 I wasn't even looking how much figure they should 8 have. If system said you should have X amount of 9 money, I said yes, we have; x amount of stock, yes, we 10 have. And the false accounting, they picked up --11 they opened the folder, "So you're trying to say this 12 figure on that day wasn't correct?" I said "Yeah, 13 it's not correct", not even knowing the date, and all 14 that.

15 They said, "Okay, this figure?" They just 16 picked figures up and yes, I said "Yes, that's not

- 18 Q. So you made some admissions in interview?
- 19 Correct, yes.

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- 20 Were you eventually charged with an offence of theft 21 and six offences of false accounting?
- 22 A. Yes, in December 2008.
- 23 Q. I think you pleaded guilty to the false accounting 24 charges?
- 25 Yes, because I knew the money is not there but I still

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- 1 accept it, so if you call false accounting, yes, I 2
- 3 **Q.** Was a plea bargain ever discussed with you?
- 4 A. No, plea bargain. But if I can take you a little bit 5 back to the --
- 6 Q. Yes, please do.

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7 A. -- you know, when the auditor came in. They ask me if 8 I want anybody here. I said no, I trusted them, they 9 will sort it out. And then they took all the bank 10 details, and then they did the home search. They 11 said, "Is it okay if we can search your home?" and all 12 that. I said, "Yes, go ahead. I've got nothing to 13 hide".

> So they went over. There were guite a few people, I can't even remember the number of people, but there were quite a few. They went through the kid's cupboard, moved the fridge everywhere there, they've been through the house and they searched. Later on, I realised they weren't supposed to because they didn't have any warrant or anything, but I was naive that I've got nothing to hide so why should I stop them, and all that.

I gave them all the bank details, they enquired the property in London. I told them the property was bought in 2000, just day before my elder son was born, so five years before we even took over the Post Office but "These are the documents, just take them".

There wasn't plea bargain but my first solicitor said to me "Plead guilty, plead guilty so you can have a lesser sentence".

- Q. Plead guilty, what, to the theft and the false accounting?
- 8 Correct, yes. Α.
- 9 But you didn't plead guilty to the theft?
- 10 No. Like, why I should I plead guilty for a crime 11 which I haven't done it?
- 12 Q. Was it ever explained to you by your lawyers or anyone 13 else why, in your case, the Post Office went ahead 14 with the theft charge, even though you had pleaded 15 guilty to the false accounting charge?
- 16 A. Later on, not in 2010, but later on, in fact, yes, we 17 did find some information.
- 18 What was that information? Q.
- 19 They knew the week before my trial there's an issue 20 with the Horizon, which they withheld. They knew --21 the way I felt it, that they wanted to set an example
- 22 to others, that if you try to raise caution on 23 Horizon, this is what will happen to you.
- 24 Q. Can you remember finding out anything subsequently 25 about the availability of confiscation orders for

1 theft charges but not for false accounting charges as 2 a motivation for proceeding with a theft charge? Or 3 am I stretching your memory?

- 4 A. A little bit.
- 5 Q. If you don't remember that, it's all right. We can 6 deal with that with other witnesses on another occasion. The fact is they went ahead with the theft 8 charges?
- 9 A. Yes.
- 10 **Q.** Winding back to when you were operating the Horizon 11 system, did you ever think that there was anything 12 wrong with the system?
- 13 A. Once the staff member mentioned that it happened with 14 the previous subpostmaster and he got the system 15 checked, so I did raise that issue with 16 Tamiko Springer, my area manager.
- 17 Q. When it came to you being charged with these seven 18 criminal offences, did you raise the issue of the 19 reliability of the Horizon system with your lawyers?
- 20 Not to start with, because I was under impression I'm A. 21 the only one, so it must be I have done something 22 wrong or my staff has done something wrong. Just when 23 my previous barrister said to me "Plead guilty" and we 24 refused, it was just the night before my first trial.
 - Q. I think that's May 2009?

Α. Yes.

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- The first trial, the one that got adjourned?
- 3 Yes, just the night before my trial, they find out 4 there are other people as well.
- 5 Q. So just tell the Chair about that. You're listed for 6 trial in May 2009, and you're saying the night before 7 the trial you found out that there were some other 8 people who'd got an issue with the Horizon system?
- 9 True. I remember that. It was just me, and then 10 there was so -- it's just like how can a barrister be 11 saying to plead guilty, so he doesn't have a faith in 12 us, how can he fight for us? I said, like, "I can't 13 be that mad that somebody ask me £10 I give them
- 14 £1,000 or £10,000". There must be, I don't know, like 15 how -- was it God willing, or something, I went onto
- 16 Google and said "Post Office cash issues", or
- 17 something, I don't know what I typed, and then there
- 18 came another -- Jo Hamilton's case, she done the
- 19 witness already, and I remember calling -- it was like
- 20 a 118118, I was just so, "My God, so is there somebody
- 21 else as well it happened". I called her, got the
- 22 number, luckily, it was late in the evening, she was
- 23 still in the shop. So, after speaking to her, I was
- 24 just, like -- I said, "Please help me, please help

25 me".

- 1 Q. Did you apply through your lawyers at the commencement
- 2 of the trial, which I think was at Guildford Crown
- 3 Court, is that right --
- 4 A. Correct, yes.
- 5 Q. -- for an adjournment of the trial?
- 6 A. Yes
- 7 Q. Was that application successful?
- 8 A. It was, yes.
- 9 Q. So the judge allowed an adjournment. Was that to
- 10 allow the issue of the reliability -- I'm calling it,
- 11 for the moment -- of the Horizon system to be
- 12 examined?
- 13 A. Correct.
- 14 **Q.** What happened after that? Was somebody instructed to
- 15 act on your behalf to explore that issue?
- 16 A. True.
- 17 Q. Who was that?
- 18 A. Mr Charles -- sorry, I can't pronounce his surname.
- 19 Q. McLachlan?
- 20 A. Correct.
- 21 Q. Correct. Was he a professor?
- 22 A. Correct, yes.
- 23 Q. Do you remember what he was a professor in?
- 24 A. IT. He's like a very big -- I remember, like
- 25 qualifications, really, was going pages and pages.
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- 1 Q. Okay. So he was instructed on your behalf?
- 2 A. Yes
- 3 Q. Were you kept up to speed with what was going on, with 4 what he was doing?
- 5 A. Yes, every time mostly we heard the trial date was
- 6 adjourned because the Post Office didn't supply the
- 7 information, and all that. It was adjourned quite
- 8 a few times because they were not supplying the
- 9 information.
- 10 Q. I think, in the end, he produced six reports
- 11 Professor McLachlan?
- 12 A. He did, and there was still some issues need to be
- 13 answered.

- 14 Q. So did there come a time when the case actually went
 - to trial at Guildford Crown Court?
- 16 **A.** Yes, on the day the trial actually began, there were
- 17 still some issues outstanding. Then judge said --
- 18 Gareth Jenkins from Fujitsu was there as well and so
- 19 did Professor Charles was there as well. So he said.
- 20 like, "It cannot drag on for longer". So he gave them
- 21 some time to go into the room so they can discuss with
- 22 each other.
- 23 Q. Before the trial started, you mentioned that there
- 24 were some disclosure issues?
- 25 A. Correct.

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- 1 Q. Can you remember what any of those were? If you
- 2 can't, it doesn't matter because we know in the
- 3 background what they were?
- 4 A. I don't know the exact wording but all I know like it
- 5 will be if it hasn't been produced, it won't be a fair
- 6 trial.
- Q. So there was an application to stop the trial becausedocuments hadn't been produced, yes?
- 9 **A.** True yeah, and every time we been adjourned, as well, quite a few times.
- quite a few times.Q. But at your trial, the way that the Horizon system
- operated and its reliability was an issue?A. Correct.
- 14 Q. You have explained that they were there. Who did you
- 15 understand Gareth Jenkins to be?
- 16 A. Fujitsu expert.
- 17 Q. Did he give evidence?
- 18 A. He did, yes.
- 19 **Q.** And Professor McLachlan?
- 20 A. He did, yes, as well.
- 21 Q. What happened at the end of the trial?
- 22 A. Jury came back with a verdict guilty.
- 23 Q. Did you give evidence in your own defence?
- 24 **A.** I did give evidence as well. I did give evidence as well.
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- Can you remember, roughly, what your defence was, in
 your own evidence, i.e. what you said had happened?
- 3 A. Yes, exactly what I told them like from day one, there
- 4 was issues and everything, and I'd been screaming for
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- 6 Q. So you explain that there was some unexplained losses?
- 7 A. Correct
- 8 Q. I think you also mentioned that there were some staff
- 9 thefts too?
- 10 A. Correct.
- 11 Q. Your case additionally involved a full-scale attack --
- full-frontal attack on the reliability of the Horizon
- 13 system?
- 14 A. Correct.
- 15 **Q.** Presumably now, all these years on, you don't remember
- the details of what each of the experts said?
- 17 A. Not each of the experts but I still remember the Judge
- 18 Stewart's wording. He said there is no fact, no
- 19 evidence that I've taken any money before they pass it
- on to jury to decide. So he said that and still jury
- 21 had to decide that if I'm guilty or not.
- 22 Q. Did you mention that you had reported your early
- losses, as shown on the system, to the help desk
- 24 through the trainers?
- 25 A. Yes, through the trainers. Like losses in the sense,

- 1 like, when the losses come, be reported, and then make 2 them good anyway.
- 3 **Q.** You told us that you made up some funds from the shop?
- 4 A. Yes.
- 5 **Q.** Did you make up funds from any other source?
- 6 A. Yes, from borrow from family as well.
- 7 Q. How much did you borrow from your family?
- 8 Round about 20,000. A.
- 9 Q. I'm sorry?
- **A.** 20.000. 10
- 11 **Q.** Was that from your sister-in-law?
- 12 A. My sister-in-law, yes.
- 13 Q. So you borrowed £20,000 from your sister-in-law and 14 put that into the Post Office system?
- 15 A. Correct, and sold our personal family jewellery as 16 well.
- 17 Q. I think it was on 11 November 2010 that you were 18 sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment for the offence 19 of theft and six months' imprisonment on each of the
- 20 false accounting charges to run concurrently; is that
- 21 right?
- 22 A. Correct.
- 23 Q. A confiscation order was made in the sum of £40,000
- 24 and you were ordered to pay compensation for £40,000,
- 25 that was to be paid out of the confiscation order sum?

- Correct. 1 A.
- 2 How was that sum, the £40,000, in fact, paid off?
- 3 A. I don't think it was paid off. They took a charge on 4 the property in London.
- 5 Q. Yes.

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- 6 Α. So they put it through auction.
- 7 So you had this second property in London. Was that 8 in Finsbury Park?
- 9 A. Finsbury Park, three-bedroomed flat, which has always 10 been buy-to-let.
- 11 Q. The Post Office took a charge over it, sold it and 12 satisfied the confiscation order?
- 13 A. I don't know how much they got, because there was 14 a mortgage as well, because I cancelled the mortgage 15 payment. Because I was angry with the Post Office, 16 I cancelled the mortgage payment as well. I did not 17 want it, like -- but yeah. I don't know how much they 18 got and all that, so yes.

But I remember then going back to court again and saying that I think it's like a pound or something. I don't know the legal terms, but it wasn't fully paid but they took the property to auction.

24 Q. Was that day the day of sentencing, 11 November 2010, 25 in fact, a special day for you?

- A. Yes. 1
- 2 Q. In a different respect?
- 3 A. Yes, my eldest son's 10th birthday.
- 4 Q. At that point, did you know that you were pregnant 5 with your second son?
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 **Q.** On being sentenced, were you taken to prison or taken 8 to somewhere else?
- 9 A. Taken to hospital, because I couldn't believe that I'd
- 10 been sent to the prison for a crime I never committed.
- 11 I didn't take any bags. Until the last minute, until
- 12 the last minute, I had a faith in the system that
- 13 I won't be sent to prison. Why should I be sent to
- 14 prison for the crime I never committed? So the
- 15 probation officer did mention about the bags. I said,
- 16 "No. I have faith. It will be all fine. It will be
- 17 all fine".

18 And when judge gave 15 months' imprisonment, 19 I didn't hear anything after that at all. All I felt 20 sharp pain in my stomach, and when I opened my eyes 21 I was in Guildford Hospital.

- 22 Q. How long did you stay in Guildford Hospital?
- 23 A. A whole night and whole day. So I think it was the 24 12th, evening, I was transferred to Bronzefield.
- 25 Q. You were transferred to?

- A. Bronzefield prison.
- 2 How long did you stay in prison?
- 3 Just under four months.
- 4 Q. When you were released from prison, I think you had to 5 wear an electronic tag; is that right?
- 6 A. Correct.
- 7 What was your experience of prison like?
- 8 Oh, nightmare. I never thought I'm going to come out
- 9 alive from there. I swear to God, if I hadn't been 10 pregnant, I would have killed myself, that's for sure.
- 11 Being in the prison for the crime I never committed,
- 12 I was like I brought a shame to my family, that was
- 13 going through my head. While in the prison, I had,
- 14 like, you know, people were self-harming them, and all
- 15 that, and I didn't trust the system anyway, and like
- 16 anything is possible in this. If I can be sent to
- 17 prison for the crime I never committed, anybody might
- 18 come and stab me, because they're on something or, you
- 19 know, anything is possible. And I might get
- 20 contaminate something from the fellow inmates, or 21
 - whatever.

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So it was like just horrendous. On one occasion, because I was mistreated by the prison authorities, then I spoke to Dav about it, we was so angry and he threaten the prison authority, you know,

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- 1 "If anything happened to my wife or my kid", he will 2 come in front of the prison and commit suicide. That 3 was "Oh my God". It was the most stressful -- I still 4 hope that it's just like a nightmare, but it's not.
- 5 Q. All this time you were pregnant?
- 6 A. Yes, pregnant for the baby we'd been waiting for, such 7 a long time.
- 8 Q. And your ten-year old son on the outside?
- 9 A. Yes.

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- 10 Q. Did he come to visit?
- 11 A. Yes, but he didn't know it's a prison. So we tell him 12 because mummy's pregnant, so she's in a special
- 13 hospital. We didn't know what to say to him. 14 Q. You were released, as we've discussed, after 15 four months on a tag. How long were you on the tag
- 17 **A.** For another four months.

for?

- 18 Q. Were you on a curfew?
- 19 A. I was under curfew, and they told me that I have to 20 behave. If I do anything, they will bring me back in,
- 21 and I was, like, I'm not worried about that because
- 22 I'm not going to go anywhere because I didn't go out
- 23 anywhere. Even I was scared to go to the shops
- 24 a supermarket. I said -- like, just in case, if while
- 25 I'm going out, and alarm goes, and they will think

- A. Yes. 2 Q. Is that right?
- 3 A. Correct.

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- 4 Q. Did you move house?
- 5 A. Yes, we were -- like, I only came to know about when 6 I came out of the prison. Day didn't never mentioned 7 me while I was in there. So I only came to know he 8 was so worried about kids' safety that, if they can do 9 this to Davinder, then kids are very young, so we 10 moved house.
- 11 Q. Did your conviction affect your ability to secure 12
- 13 **A.** Yes. I was so -- I didn;t not have any confidence. 14 I couldn't work in office at most (unclear), like 15 people would be talking about me, because that's what 16 whole village did. They stopped speaking to us and we 17 lost friends and like, in my view, everybody knew. 18 Even if I'm working in the office, they say "Oh, she's 19 the thief". If something goes wrong "She's 20 a convicted criminal so she must have done something".

So being an IT background, I said to Dav, you know, let me just do -- be an Uber driver, in that way people might not know me and there's no cash handling, so I may be able to get that job. Because it was just on Dave's shoulder, he was working, and even that

"Oh, she's the one with the tag on, so she must be criminal, let's put her back in". I didn't want to risk it so I didn't go out.

I went in labour with the tag on and I was thinking "Oh my God, it's just like what could be the midwife thinking like, what kind of mother I'm going to be".

- Q. I've read that you were called something, sort of, nasty when -- at this stage; is that right?
- 10 "Pregnant thief". A.
- 11 The "pregnant thief".
- 12 A. "Pregnant thief". My picture was in the front of 13 local newspaper, "Pregnant thief", Davinder gone and
- 14 been beaten up. While I was in the prison, Davinder,
- 15 my husband, had been beaten up quite a few times,
- 16 because he's my husband, so locals beaten him up as 17
- 18 Was that because of what those people said linked to, Q. 19 firstly, your race and, secondly, you having stolen 20 money, in their view?
- 21 A. Yes, they said to Dav, like, "Go back to your 22 country", and they use all that words.
- 23 Q. The words I've seen recorded as having been said to 24 your husband were: "Fucking Paki, coming to this 25 country, and stealing old people's money".

application was refused.

In between -- because of my conviction, they couldn't have convicted criminal running an Uber taxi. In the meantime, I said "Okay" -- because I didn't have the courage to go out and work with other people, I couldn't. I did my childminding, as well. I said "Okay, so I can work from home, and all that". Even that wasn't successful, because I see in my local Facebook, all the people been asking for childminder but nobody was coming to me because of my conviction.

Did the conviction affect other areas of your life?

I was thinking of a word or a feeling to describe that. I couldn't -- I couldn't find -- I couldn't find that. Definitely all over.

> For nine years we had to hide the truth from our eldest son. We only told him 2019, when we won GLO that this is what happened. He was only ten years old in the morning Mummy promising him to, dropping him to school, that in the evening we will celebrate your birthday together and in the evening I'm not here, and then he will find out I'm in the prison. Just approaching teenager, as well, and I didn't know what to do. So we have to hide the truth from him.

24 You revealed that to him in 2019? Q.

25 Α. Correct.

- Q. What caused that? 1
- 2 Sorry what?
- 3 Q. What made you make that decision?
- 4 A. Because at least we had a one victory on black and
- 5 white piece of paper that I'm not the only one and
- 6 I wasn't mad screaming for help. So it was proven in
- 7 the High Court, yes, Horizon is not a robust system
- 8 that they are claiming. So I'm not -- I knew I'm not
- 9 criminal but at least one of the big courts decided as
- 10 well, yeah, there was something wrong with the system,
- 11 not with the people.
- 12 Q. So it was part of the outcome of the Group
- 13 Litigation --
- 14 A. Correct.
- 15 Q. -- that prompted you to tell?
- 16 A. Yes.
- Q. Were you involved in the Group Litigation from the 17
- 18
- 19 A. Yes. Yes, very start. I remember in the beginning,
- 20 it was only like five/ten of us, like ten people
- 21 around the table and everything, and then from there
- 22 to big group.
- 23 Q. Did you receive money?
- 24 A. I did receive some money.
- 25 Q. Under the settlement agreement?

- 1 Yes, I did receive some money.
- 2 You told us that you lost a job?
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. With a salary that you built up to £80,000?
- 5
- 6 Q. That you invested £200,000-odd in the Post Office?
- 7 A. Correct.
- 8 That you had paid money in out of the shop takings to
- 9 try to balance the books?
- 10 A. Correct.
- 11 That you had borrowed £20,000 from your sister-in-law?
- 12 A.
- 13 Q. Did you get all of that back under the agreement?
- 14 A. No.
- 15 Q. Why not?
- They have their own ways of dealing with it and decide 16
- 17 what they want to do probably.
- 18 Q. Who's the "they" in that?
- 19 Royal Mail and Post Office. It was -- like now, it's
- 20 separate but, yes, Post Office.
- 21 Q. Do those financial consequences that I've just
- 22 discussed, that loss of money, still affect you?
- 23 A. It does, it does. It still makes me shiver when
- 24 I think about the time we gone through, the things we
- 25 have sacrificed.

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- 1 **Q.** Did you take part in any other mediation or scheme?
- 2 A. Yes. As far as I remember, my name was put forward
- 3 for mediation but it was refused because I have 4 a conviction.
- 5 Q. More recently, have you sought to make a claim under
- 6 the Historical Shortfall Scheme, the HSS?
- 7 A. I don't know the exact word. No, I can't recall.
- 8 Q. Standing here now, sitting here now, looking back,
- 9 what would you like to happen, so far as the
- 10 Post Office is concerned?
- 11 A. You know, I've been writing it down, I've got lots of
- 12 things. Definitely -- it wasn't just the postmasters
- 13 who suffered, it was the whole family. We personally
- 14 had to sell our shop in negative equity. We lost our
- 15 investment in London, which we --
- 16 Q. If you want to refer to something that you have
- 17 written down, to prompt your memory, then please say
- 18 SO.
- 19 A. Yes
- 20 I know that it's difficult to sometimes remember
- 21 everything you want to say when it comes to this
- 22
- 23 True, and putting in right words, as well. It's just
- 24 all there and just saying it, it is difficult.
- 25 Q. Please do.

was going on, and I can still feel the frustration in him that he couldn't protect me from Post Office and he couldn't get justice for me yet. I still feel that

Davinder, by husband, become alcoholic because of what

frustration in him that I don't know how they're going to cover that.

And while I was in the prison my parents back home in India thought that, you know, because I wasn't able to talk to them, they thought Dav might have harmed me. So they were harassing him, saying like,

- 11 you know, like, "What have you done to our daughter?" 12 So they were, like -- he was getting pressure from my
- 13 parents as well. But I couldn't call them, so he did
- 14 like -- not a conference call, so he called my Dad and
- 15 then he put the phone next to -- because I was allowed
- 16 to call him, so we set a time that I will call at that
- 17 time, so he called Dad and that's how we got to talk,
- 18 and that calmed my parents down. But before he was
- 19 thinking that he'd been a good son-in-law but what
- 20 happened to him. So that pressure was there. I can't 21 even imagine what he had to go through.

22 Our ten-year-old son, he'd say, "Okay, like 23 "Mummy gone to prison but when she going to come back?

While we lost the business, we set up a taxi

When she going to come back?"

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firm. So while the trial was going on and everything, so I was the one taking the calls and then we had Davinder and the other drivers who was passing the job onto them. So when I was sent away, that business we had losses in, because there was nobody taking the call and Davinder had to leave the ten-year-old son at home sometime at night as well, keep him on the video call, and do the runs, because he had to pay the bills. So sometime, I think, like, you know, it was the eldest son kept Dav alive and the youngest one kept me alive, otherwise we wouldn't be here. We wouldn't have been here, the things we have gone through.

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I had some health issues after having the eldest son, that's why I couldn't conceive and there was like a huge gap. We'd been waiting, including the eldest son, he had been waiting to have a sibling. He always used to say that my sister-in-law's -- like, his elder son got a sibling and their brother's son got a sibling. I'm the only one. He'd been waiting. He'd been praying to God, "I want a sibling, I want a sibling", and when the news came, we couldn't celebrate it as a family. We had to -- we were happy but, at the same time, we were sad that we couldn't even hold each other's hand.

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Giving birth with a tag on, even that time the thought was, like, in me, it was early morning birth. I said, "Oh my God, alarm will go and they will come and get me from the hospital". I couldn't believe anybody, I know. The solicitors said, "It will be fine, we have informed them" but I couldn't -- I said, "No, anything is possible. If I can send to the prison for the crime I never committed, anything is possible in this country". I was worried about that.

And work. Until this date, finding any document or anything, you know, when they have a conviction column to tick, that bring back the nightmares. Anything, it's just like anything -- it is a small thing, it is like a basic thing, but not for me.

- Q. So like on an insurance application?
- 16 A. Anything, anything.
- 17 Even though you now rightly tick no? 18 Even when they say now, there's no -- I just say, "You 19 know, anything" -- in the eye of the law I was 20 a convicted criminal until 23 April 2021 anyway. Even 21 now, "Make any statement, make sure it's true, 22 otherwise it be an offence". I say -- I laugh about 23 it now, but I say "Please don't say that, I just came 24 out of one conviction". So, like, my hand shivers to 25 sign.

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I was so scared when I came out when most of the people stopped talking to us anyway. When we moved house as well, when everybody used to ask me my name I just used to say Seema. I'm proud of my name, you know. I never say "Seema Misra", what if they Google it, because it was everywhere. For eight years we didn't celebrate my youngest son's birthday because I was scared, you know. I did not want him to get bullied at school. It was just like, I'm blessed, I'm blessed to have a lovely family, blessed that Davinder is my husband and two beautiful kids. I'm blessed to have them. But I didn't want anyone to know that I'm his wife or I'm my kids' mother because, in me, it was "I want to protect my kids".

I did the late school runs so nobody can see me. My elder son play cricket. I used to take him to -when I started going out a bit, I used to drop him to matches, never stepped into the ground because I thought "Oh, my God, he's doing so well in his life, I don't want my name attached to him so people caution him", I wanted to protect my kids. I just like used to park my car way, that I can see him, I can be proud of him, I can see him playing, but I did not want anybody else to see me.

> I lost my faith in the system completely. It 75

was because of, I would say, honourable Paul Marshall, Flora Page, Nick Gould and Nick Wallis, they brought my faith back into the system. You know, "We will get justice for you".

There came a point during my appeal when Mr Marshall and Ms Page have to step down. I was so scared. I was so scared. For me, it's just like Post Office authority is like a Mafia. I'm saying this because I wanted to say, "Please don't send me (unclear) in my place", saying that you say to everything. In my view, they were like a Mafia. Because of whatever happened, if Mr Marshall and Ms Page have to step down, they might get me killed. Swear to God, I was like -- I was scared to go out, that I'm going to cross a road, Post Office will probably hire somebody and they might crush me. I was scared to drive that, you know, they might get me involved in an accident. So I never get to the court, like all that kind of things. I might be just making it up but that's how I was: afraid.

My eldest son study at university in London. I was like calling him, you know, like "When are you coming home", and everything, "Speak to me every hour, let me know where you are". I was so scared of everybody's safety that anything is possible.

Anything is possible.

There was a time, because I couldn't work, even for the essentials we had to compromise. There was like, in Asian cooking, we have like a different, different, kind of lentils. There were, like, over 10-plus kind of lentils. If you buy a pack each, it will be expensive. So I used to buy one bigger one and when kids used to ask, "Why we having this one regularly now?" I used to say, "It's good for you, this one is more healthier" because we couldn't afford the essential needs.

Our growth were amazing before buying the Post Office: no loan, our cars were fully paid, everything before the Post Office, before 29 June 2005. Our growth was stopped. Our golden era was, like, as a young couple: that we couldn't enjoy. Precious time with the kids: that we couldn't enjoy.

I think you asked what I want from the Post Office.

Q. I did.

A. Lots of things. I will do my best to be polite.
 I wanted to ask them, you know, why on earth they
 played with the postmasters, not just postmasters, and
 their families' life? In my eyes, and everybody knows
 now, Post Office have blood on their hands and

Q. And that the prosecution team had managed to destroy it?

c. Correct, yes, but we only came to know that recently, even back in 2011, when I came out. We know, like, there are so many people suffering but the one thing is lacking there is no much -- not many people know about it. Everybody been told that they are the only one. So, like, even if I could save one life by going into the media saying "This what happened to me", I feel glad, I feel happy, that people need to know about it because it wasn't widely known, that's why.

Being working -- having a newsagent for last nearly since 2003, even before buying the Post Office, we had a newsagent store, we didn't know about it. So, did you know, like to go and tell everybody, "Hold on, be strong, you're not the only one. We will get through this".

- Q. Sorry, I interrupted you.
- A. That's fine.

What come in my mind, as you probably gathered, I done my schooling in India and I read there in India, it's probably the same everywhere, the democracy is the Government for people and by the people. But, in Post Office scandal, made me feel this is a land of two law. There's a separate law for

I believe now, and I read it somewhere as well, that we live in a developed country. But how can we let all this criminal roaming around freely?

How can Post Office lied under oath in my trial, so did Gary Jenkins from Fujitsu, and when I lost my case they celebrated. Why? Because they wanted to set an example to others. This, I only found out later. They probably thought, you know, they can crush this Indian lady. I probably won't make a noise or say anything to anybody and, you know, nobody will know about it.

But, I'm afraid, I'm sorry to say that, they were wrong. My motto is to let everybody know, like who's suffering from the Post Office, that they are not the only one. That was a very difficult decision for us to go in the media but I would like to let everybody know that was the reason like they are not the only one, the other people as well. I wanted to let the true picture of Post Office known to the other people as well.

- Q. Are you referring there to the later discovery of a document which said that your case had involved an unprecedented attack on the integrity of the Horizon system?
- A. Correct, yes but back --

the rich and in authority and then there's a separate law for people in common people. Example: we have to get 46 million to bring the truth forward. Whereas the common people is restricted by law, they get penalised. Even like signing a council document, we have to make sure that is the correct information, otherwise it is an offence -- any document. Whereas authorities can lie under oath, no contempt of court, like Gareth Jenkins did in my trial. He had an oath. He took an oath, and lied under oath. Excuse me for pronouncing the name correctly, Paul (unclear) lied to Parliament, contempt of Parliament, big offence in my eye, and it should be big offence in democratic country. But nothing happened.

Jarnail Singh, and whoever was the head of the Post Office Legal Department when my trial was going on, they deliberately hide the evidence from court which could have proved me innocent, but they decided not to. Contempt of court.

In the court, we asked for witnesses from Post Office like Michael, Tamiko. Post Office denied: Michael never been to the Post Office. I don't know what the legal term would be for that. I don't know. They erased Michael's call log. All these people, until date, they've been having fun time with their

loved ones. Well, whereas my family and the fellow postmasters' family and themselves, we were having challenges, health challenges, wealth, peace of mind, which proves that it's a land of two laws.

At least it's proven until now Gareth Jenkins in my trial, Jarnail Singh, head of Post Office legal system Paula Vennells are a criminal and it's black and white written down. Why are they still roaming around?

Another thing that always bothered me, me and you we've been told you're the only one. But authorities, judiciary system, police system must have noticed something. Why is there suddenly a rise in postmasters being cautioned and taken to judge? There must be some sort of, like, an information feed or something, you know, because they are part of establishment — and they make each other happy probably. That's why they're roaming around freely.

At least, at least all not just like the people in my case named — at least people who have been named so far and who are going to be named later on, at least they should be arrested, get arrested, get arrested and get cautioned. Whereas like, you know, the fault of Horizon system we've been cautioned and here now we know two big courts, two big courts of the

country, said -- you know, like, they named some people and they say, like, they are a criminal wandering around. I don't feel safe that we were criminal wandering around in our streets like that.

For a job application, mortgage, even to get a mobile contract, we common people have to go through credit checks, conviction checks and a lot more; wherever whoever involved in a court proceeding get CBE, get titles, what kind of checks they do?

I bet if, you know, like somebody been (unclear) by going through court proceeding they've been honoured. If that happened in India, there will be lots of examples. People would have stepped down in shame. They would have had a shame on themselves. Oh my God, I can't take this honour. Whereas -- title might be wrong, Chairman or -- it was Alex Crozier -- it was Crozier, Alan Crozier -- Adam Crozier, sorry.

They were the people the head of the Post Office when my trial was going on when there was like a lot of Horizon Issues were going on. What are they doing now? Chairman of BT. So they don't have to go through all these checks and all that. It's just only for the common people. The people in the authorities, they can just -- we took you to court, you are criminal, we ruined you life but forget it. We're

going to make most of our money. We will have all this big, big (unclear).

I took my Post Office salary from 50 to 80,000. But whose turnover got increased? Post Office turnover got increased. You know?

I've been awarded Crown of Colleague Award from Post Office because what I want happened in the evening by the balancing time, I didn't let that happen during daytime by serving the people. I made sure we had, like, increasing the salary they must have done -- we must have done something good, like the service. We changed, like, uniform as well to make sure that people feel welcome and everything. It's a busy post office. We used to, like, have extra seating for the people to sit down and all that. We're the one who took the -- help Post Office to get the turnover.

But what we did we get in return? Convictions.

Do you know what I think, that all these people who made money, they might have retired now, they might have stepped down or whatever, but since the Horizon issue started, not just in my case, like whoever was involved in there, at least definitely the people who are named, they should be behind the bars straight away. Sometime I wonder what are we waiting 83

for? Are we waiting for them so they can run away? And then we say, oh my God, this is a different country law over there, whatever. I don't know why. What are we waiting for?

Their money should be taken off them, their houses should be put on to auction like they did mine, and their money should be distributed among 555 because looks like it, we getting penalised. You know like we normally say to kids, I normally say to kids as well, you know like when the kids are growing up we tell them, "Oh, tell me the truth. I won't tell you off". That's what we normally do to the kids. Here 555 taken them to the court and we're getting penalised for that. Oh my God, how can you do that? That's what my feeling is. We're getting penalised for that, like, to bringing the truth in front of everybody.

On my trial in Guildford Crown Court,
Judge Stewart said there is no fact, no evidence that
I've taken any money. But why then, when the judge
believed that I haven't done anything, why we still
have to wait for jury to decide? You know. Big -two big courts of the country so far told Post Office
so many things. It, like told, Post Office it's
a mass destruction on industrial state. But they

don't care. When I say "they", it means Post Office and authorities. They don't care.

I clearly can see, you know, like they probably thinking like, oh, give them a chance to run away or something probably. That's what my feeling is, why they're not still -- people have been taken to police station for the small amount. Here, we're talking about millions and millions. So many lives, so many people are not here to be with us. And they are the ones who are lying freely. I definitely don't feel comfortable my kids roaming around freely.

I want Inquiry to punish them, not let them to pass the blame. Oh, yes I notice that they pass to that person like that kind of stuff.

And another thing, you know, like I'm really thankful for the Inquiry, you know, so we can put our point forward. But at the same time, I don't want Post Office to hide behind the Inquiry and saying that, "Okay, we'll make a decision when the Inquiry is done". Inquiry going to find who know what and what punishment they like but they don't -- for whatever decision they need to, whatever caution they need to answer, they should still carry on.

Until now I told my story so many times but again when I still speak about it, it brings the

nightmares back. It's just like all these sounds, everything, I can just feel it like it's just happened. It doesn't -- I am not convicted criminal anymore but I don't think I'll ever be -- it's like lifetime imprisonment. It's like a lifetime imprisonment for me and my family. I don't think I'll be able to -- I would love to forget about it and move on but I don't know how.

Every time we go to court, we find a new evidence, where there'll be a Clarke advice, shredding document, and they were probably like some more coming up as well. But can they be sincere for once and say the truth and accept it and -- to be honest, I say it for myself, and probably the same for everybody, not just physically, we are mentally tired. We are mentally tired. We wanted to enjoy life whatever we got left. Can't just, like -- it's not easy thing, but that doesn't mean we're going to give up. We do want the answer.

I just say: please get this sorted.

MR BEER: Thank you very much, Mrs Misra. They're all the questions that I ask of you.

Chair, have you got any questions that you wish to ask of Mrs Misra?

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, thank you, Mr Beer, but, as with

the last witness, I'd like just to say a few words.

Mrs Misra, you are right, of course, that you have told your story on a number of occasions to a number of different people, and I was fully aware of most of what you had said this morning and I have been aware of it for, well, virtually for the whole time that I've been involved in this Inquiry. But all that said, there's no substitution for me hearing it directly from you and, just by way of an example, who could have actually understood the impact not just upon you but your husband and your children without listening carefully to what you have said this morning and now into this afternoon?

So thank you very much for coming to give evidence to this Inquiry. I appreciate it very much.

A. Thank you.

MR BEER: Thank you, Chair. I wonder whether it might be appropriate to take the lunch break now -- we're in your hands at this end -- and come back at 1.30.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I think one of the disadvantages of remote hearings, Mr Beer, is that you are much better placed to judge whether or not we should take our break now and I will fit in with everyone's arrangements.

MR BEER: I'm never one to refuse a meal; so can we say

1 1.30?

2 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Certainly. I'll see you all then

3 again.

4 MR BEER: Thank you.

5 (12.38 pm)

6 (Luncheon Adjournment)

7 (1.34 pm)

MS HODGE: Good afternoon, sir. Can you see and hear us?

9 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, I can. Can you see and hear me?

MS HODGE: We can thank you. Our next and final witness

11 for today is Ms Janet Skinner.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: With whom, of course, I've met already.

So nice to meet you again, Ms Skinner.

14 A. You too, Sir Wyn.

JANET LOUISE SKINNER (affirmed) Questioned by MS HODGE

MS HODGE: As you know, Ms Skinner, my name is

Catriona Hodge and I ask questions on behalf of the

19 Inquiry?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Please can you state your full name?

22 A. Yes, it's Ms Janet Louise Skinner.

23 Q. You made a statement on 16 February of this year; is

24 that correct?

25 A. Yes.

- 1 Q. Do you have a copy of that statement?
- 2 A. I do, yes.
- 3 Q. Can I ask you, please, to turn to the final page,
- 4 page 6?
- 5 A. Yes
- 6 **Q.** Can you see your signature in the bottom half of that 7 page?
- 8 A. I can, yes.
- 9 Q. Was the content of the statement true to the best of
- 10 your knowledge and belief when it was made?
- 11 A. Yes.
- 12 Q. I'd like to begin by asking you a few questions about
- 13 yourself.
- 14 A. Yes.
- 15 **Q.** Where in the country are you from?
- 16 A. I'm from Hull, Yorkshire.
- 17 Q. How old are you now?
- 18 **A.** I'm 51.
- 19 Q. You have two children; is that right?
- 20 A. I do, yes.
- 21 Q. How old are they?
- 22 A. 33 and 30. I was quite young.
- 23 Q. You joined the Post Office in 1994; is that correct?
- 24 A. I did, yes, 20 February 1994.
- 25 **Q.** How old were you when you first started working for

- 1 the Post Office?
- 2 A. I was probably 33, I think, at the time.
- 3 Q. What was the role that you performed?
- 4 A. It was just -- I was -- I applied in the shop and
- 5 because they put a notice in the window, they just
- 6 wanted a counter clerk, and it just to cover the
 - dinner hours. So it was just 10.00 until 2.00
- 8 because, obviously, my children were at school at that
- 9 point, so it worked well, so it was between school
- 10 times.

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- 11 Q. At this stage, were you an employee of the Post Office
- 12 or a subpostmaster?
- 13 A. It was -- the actual franchises was owned by United
- 14 News but I believe they was actually owned by the
- 15 Royal Mail at the time, because it was part of the
- 16 Royal Mail.
- 17 **Q.** Can you please describe the branch where you worked?
- 18 A. It was on a council estate, so it was extremely busy
- 19 all the time. Sometimes you didn't even have time to
- 20 lift your head to actually see who you were serving.
- So you would get that engrossed in serving people that
- you would expect a woman's voice, when you looked up
 - and it weren't, it was a man, so ...
- 24 Q. Did you enjoy your work as a counter clerk?
- 25 **A.** I loved it. Every day was a different day. You just 90
- never, ever had two days the same. You, sort of, got used to the people you were serving, as well.
- 3 Q. You described dealing with customers at the desk?
- 4 A. Yes.
- ${\bf 5}$ ${\bf Q}.$ Were you ever required to do balancing, when you were
- 6 a counter clerk?
- 7 **A.** No, no, no, no.
- 8 Q. You were later appointed as a subpostmistress in 2002;9 is that right?
- 10 **A.** Yes.
- 11 **Q.** What attracted you to the role of subpostmistress?
- 12 A. It was -- I wasn't actually the postmistress, I was
- 13 just a manager at the time, and it was somebody who
- 14 I used to work with. She was actually, like,
- 15 a postmistress and she was running a number of offices
- 16 and overlooking a number of offices, and she offered
- me a job as the manager. Because I'd already worked
- from '94, so I became a counter clerk, an assistant
- 19 manager and then a manager.
- 20 Q. Which branch was that?
- 21 A. To be honest, I've worked in all of them all over
- 22 Hull.
- 23 Q. Is it right to say you did at some point become
- 24 a subpostmistress?
- 25 **A.** Yes, that was in 2004.

- Q. In 2004. Which branch was it that you --
- 2 A. That was the North Bransholme but I was actually
- 3 postmistress to two. There was another one, which was
- 4 Bodmin Road, it was called but that was closed about
- 5 six months after my contract with them. It was closed
- 6 due to the rejuvenation scheme that was put in place
- 7 from the Government to close so many offices.
- 8 Q. Did you purchase the North Bransholme branch?
- the Post Office. So they paid me a fixed salary and

A. No, no, no. I worked -- my contract was signed with

- 11 I just run it for them.
- 12 **Q.** Were there other staff employed in the branch?
- 13 **A.** Yes.
- 14 Q. How many?
- 15 **A.** Three.
- 16 **Q.** What was the salary that you received from the
- 17 Post Office for running this branch?
- 18 **A.** I think it was either 4,500 or -- I can't actually
- 19 remember which one it was.
- 20 Q. Is that per month?
- 21 A. Yeah, that was per month. So then I covered, do you
- 22 know, like the salary for the staff and the rent on
- 23 the business itself.
- ${\bf 24} \quad {\bf Q}. \quad {\it Was the Horizon system installed in your branch when}$
- 25 you took it over?

- 1 A. Yes
- 2 Q. Had you had any previous experience of using the 3 system before you became a subpostmistress?
- 4 A. Yes. It was installed when I worked in an office 5 called Grandale in Hull in 2000, and that's when I had 6 the first, sort of like, pot call with the Horizon 7 system itself.
- 8 What problems did you experience when using Horizon?
- 9 The Horizon system, it never balanced. It was either 10 up or it was down. It was never spot on. I mean, 11 when we first had it installed, I still used to use 12 the normal ledgers because, obviously, when you're --13 before the Horizon system was installed, you had your 14 daily ledger, and then you transferred your daily 15 ledger into the weekly ledger, and that was how you 16 balanced. So if anything was missing, you had 17 everything in front of you, that you could 18 re-double-check.

So I carried on for a couple of months actually doing it that way, and it was balancing on the ledgers but not balancing on the Horizon. So it was never

- 23 **Q.** When you became a subpostmistress, who was responsible 24 for discrepancies?
 - A. Me. It was totally my responsibility.

When you experienced an apparent discrepancy or 2 shortfall shown by Horizon, what did you do?

- 3 Well, you'd have to go through everything that you had 4 on hand, like giro things and making sure your REMs 5 have been done correctly, but the only thing you 6 really had was what you had in front of you, and 7 I think what the Horizon system installation did was 8 it took away all of the paperwork that you had that 9 you could check. So the only thing -- information you 10 actually had available was what the Horizon system 11 gave you.
- 12 Q. To whom did you look for assistance?
- 13 The helpline. I rung the helpline on numerous 14 occasions. To be honest, when you rang them, it was 15 like they were reading from a script. You could tell 16 what they was reading. It was something -- it was 17 script written because of the way it was said to you 18 over the phone, and if they couldn't help you, they 19 would just say "Well, you just have to make it good 20
- 21 Q. According to the judgment of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division), you contacted the helpline 22 23 116 times between 1 January 2004 and 31 January 2005; 24 is that right?
- 25 A. Yes.

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- 1 Q. What advice did you receive?
- 2 A. Basically the same: if the office was short, it was my 3 responsibility to make good, that I was wrong.
- 4 Q. You've explained in your statement that matters came 5 to a head in 2006?
- 6 A. Yes.

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- 7 Q. What happened?
- 8 A. The loss -- my office was running at a loss of 9 £40,000. I had a visit from two retail network 10 managers. There's only one of them I can remember her 11 name and it's Diane Oyles, and when they came I took 12 them in the back, explained to them that my offices 13 was running at a loss. They asked if they could do 14 a cash check while they was there and then they said, 15 "Well, what we'll do is we'll keep the office open, 16 we'll just do a cash check".

So I said, "Well, to be honest, I'd rather close it, have an audit and sort it out", and so they did the cash check, we closed the office, they removed the keys from me and told me I had to meet them there the next morning at 9.00 with the auditors.

- 22 Q. How did you feel when you were told to leave your 23 branch?
- 24 Devastated, absolutely devastated, but I think I was A. 25 more relieved, as well, because I thought now, 95

- obviously, they're going to get to the bottom of what's gone wrong. I think you, sort of, you put your
- 3 trust in them because, as they keep portraying,
 - themselves the Post Office are a trusted brand and
 - their trust wasn't to find a problem that, it was to
- 6 find a solution, and I was the solution.
 - You have described employees of the Post Office coming to your branch to carry out an audit. What did they
- 9 tell you about the outcome of that audit? 10 They just said that it was actually running at a loss
- 11 of 59,000 and I was suspended without pay. I was
- 12 searched before I left and I was also informed that if
- 13 I removed anything from the office, it would be
- 14 classed as theft. So all paperwork, nothing,
- 15 I couldn't move anything. It all became the property 16 of the Post Office.
- 17 Q. How did you feel when you returned home later that 18
- 19 I was devastated, absolutely. Everything just A. 20 crushed. You just feel crushed.
- 21 **Q.** What further enquiries did the Post Office carry out 22 to get to the bottom of this apparent shortfall?
- 23 They interviewed the staff, and then I -- and then, to 24 be honest, nothing. I had no -- they requested that

25 I go for an interview the next day, which I got from

- 1 a phonecall after the audit.
- 2 Q. Were you told you were going to be interviewed?
- 3 A. They just asked -- somebody rang me and said "Would
- 4 you attend an interview tomorrow? It's just a chat
- 5 it's not really -- you don't have to bring anybody
- 6 with you, but if you do bring somebody with you they
- 7 can't speak and if they do speak, they'll be told to
- 8 leave". So I attended a main Post Office branch on
- 9 Bransholme the following day and met with two
- 10 Post Office investigators, Diane Matthews and Steven
- 11 Bradshaw.

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- 12 Q. Was it an informal chat, as you'd been led to believe?
- A. Well, they just said -- I gone up the stairs and they
 said "We're having a problem with the recording
 equipment" and, across the road, about a two-minute
 walk there was a police station. "Would you mind if
 we rang them and asked if we could use their
 equipment?" So I said, you know, no. I didn't have
- 18 equipment?" So I said, you know, no. I didn't have
 19 anything to hide, so I wasn't really that bothered
 20 about it.

So we walked over to the police station and then, obviously, they set up the recording and then, as soon as they started recording, they then cautioned me. So then I knew, at that point, that they was actually looking at me.

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- 1 **Q.** Before you were cautioned had anybody told you that you were suspected of stealing this money?
- 3 A. No, no.
- 4 **Q.** Can you please describe how the interview was conducted?
- 6 A. Their main point is, "What did you do with the money?"
- 7 And, at first, I thought, "Do you know, if it's not
- 8 me, I know it's not me" and so then I started thinking
- 9 could it be my staff stealing money because obviously
- you've got -- the money's got to be going somewhere.
- 11 But it was the same thing. I didn't have any proof
- that anybody else had stolen anything and they just
- 13 wanted to know what I was going to do about the
- 14 losses
- 15 Q. How was the interview concluded?
- 16 A. They concluded the interview, said that they would be
- 17 speaking to the staff but, at the end of it, Steven
- 18 Bradshaw did say to me, "We've dealt with people who
- 19 have stolen from the Post Offices before and we know
- 20 you haven't done anything wrong".
- 21 **Q.** You have explained you were suspended by the
- 22 Post Office on the date that, I was going to say, the
 - discrepancy was found, but you told them there was
- 24 discrepancy showing in the Horizon system.
- 25 A. Yes. That was 13 May.

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- Q. When did you discover that the Post Office was going
 to bring a prosecution against you?
- 3 A. I received a letter from them in August 2006.
- 4 **Q.** Do you recall the offences with which you were charged?
- A. They said that they were charging me with falseaccounting and theft.
- 8 Q. How did you plead to those charges?
- 9 **A.** Well, the letter, obviously, stated I had to attend
- the Hull Magistrates' Court, which I did with my legal
 representation, which was Karl Turner and, on the day,
- he said, "They've offered you a plea bargain, if you
- 13 plead guilty to the false accounting, they'll drop the
- 14 theft". But, to be honest, in hindsight, they have
- 15 everything -- access to my bank accounts anyway, so
- they knew that I actually hadn't stolen anything.
- 17 So -- but Karl had said, obviously, if you take the
- 18 lesser charge, plead guilty to it, you won't get --
- 19 there's a good chance you won't get a custodial
- 20 sentence. So that's what I did.
- Q. Did you know at that time that there were others who'dexperienced problems using Horizon, like you?
- 23 **A.** No.
- 24 Q. How old were your children at this time?
- 25 **A.** My daughter was 17 and my son was 14.

- 1 **Q.** Did you tell your children about the prosecution?
- 2 A. No. No, I didn't.
- 3 Q. Why not?

23

- 4 A. Pardon?
- 5 Q. Why not?
- 6 A. Because I didn't need them to worry about it. They
- 7 was both going through school. They just -- at that
- 8 time, like me, I didn't think we had anything to worry
- 9 about
- 10 **Q.** You were convicted in the Crown Court upon your guilty 11 plea?
- 12 **A.** Yes
- 12 **A.** 165.
- 13 **Q.** Was your conviction reported in the press?
- 14 A. Yes, it was front page of the Hull Daily Mail.
- 15 **Q.** What effect did that have on you and your children?
- 16 **A.** Well, I was already in jail when they did that because
- 17 it was published, I think, on the Saturday. I was
- 18 sentenced on 2 February 2007. The Magistrates' Court
- 19 adjourned it to the Crown Court, and I attended the
- 20 Crown Court in the January of 2007, and they wanted
- 21 a probation report done, which then made it four weeks
- 22 later. But the probation report was not very good
- 23 because I wouldn't admit I'd done anything wrong.
- 24 They found me untrustworthy, so I was given
- 25 a nine-month custodial sentence on 2 February.

- Q. Were you aware when you attended court on 2 February 1 2 that you might be sent to prison?
- 3 A. No, I really didn't think I had, because to go to 4 jail, you've got to have committed a crime and, if you 5 can't prove that you've permitted a crime, because
- 6 I couldn't I hadn't and they couldn't prove I had, but 7 yet I still went to jail.
- 8 Q. Where in court were you standing when the judge read 9 out your sentence?
- 10 A. In the dock.
- 11 Q. What did the security guards do when the judge 12 sentenced you to prison?
- 13 A. You're stood in the dock, and he said that he was 14 giving me a nine-month prison sentence because of the 15 amount of money that was involved, because I'd stolen 16 from the Crown, and I heard the gate lock and then he
- 17 told me that it was a custodial sentence. I'll be 18 honest, I thought he was going to say "suspended" but 19 he didn't.
- 20 Q. How did you feel when you were escorted out of the 21 courtroom?
- 22 A. I was just an emotional wreck, I don't actually 23 remember. The only thing I remember is being in the 24 holding cell and then going to Wakefield Prison.
- 25 **Q.** How were you transported there? 101

- 1 In -- well, they took me out in handcuffs, put me in 2 one of those police transport things.
- 3 Q. What happened upon your arrival at prison?
- 4 A. I was photographed, finger printed, told to remove my 5 clothes so that they could strip search me. So they 6 put -- made me stand behind the curtain and squat and 7 then put a mirror underneath to make sure you're not 8 taking anything in with you.
- 9 **Q.** Did you have an opportunity to speak to your children 10 when you arrived into prison?
- 11 **A.** I was given a phonecall there in the evening and my 12 daughter wouldn't actually speak to me because she was 13 just -- she was an emotional wreck and I didn't want 14 to speak to her, to be honest. I felt so ashamed. 15 I was supposed to be there to protect them and show 16 them what -- you do the right thing but yet you do the 17 right thing and I went to jail anyway.
- 18 Were your children able to visit you in prison?
- 19 I didn't want them visiting me. That was the only 20 thing I could control and it was hard enough for me to 21 have that memory of me being in jail, they weren't 22 having that memory of me being in jail. So I refused 23 to see them.
- 24 Q. You were released from prison in April 2007 after serving two and a half months of your sentence; is 25 102

- 1 that right?
- 2 A. Yes. I was in Drake Hall, as well, after Wakefield, 3 and then it was there I got released on 12 April.
- 4 Q. What conditions were imposed on you?
- 5 A. I was put on tag 6.00 until 6.00 curfew, and that was 6 until the August of 2007.
- We'll shortly address the circumstances in which your conviction came to be quashed in April of last year but I'd like to ask you a bit about the confiscation 10 proceedings, before we do that, if I may.

After you were released from prison, the Post Office obtained a confiscation order against you; is that right?

14 A. Yes

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- 15 **Q.** That was in the sum of £11,000?
- 16 A. Yeah, but that was for compensation. But they put 17 that charge against my property that I earned at the 18 time but, obviously, due to the fact that I'd lost my 19 job, I was unable to pay my mortgage. So my 20 mortgage -- my house was literally -- I was fighting 21 against the mortgage company to keep hold of it, so 22 that I could sell it, which is what I did. I ended up 23 selling it and completing on 31 October 2007.
- 24 Q. What happened as a result of the sale of your house?
- 25 A. The mortgage company had given me a huge penalty for

1 settling the mortgage early, so there was actually no 2 funds left for the Post Office to take.

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- What action did they take in relation to the £11,000?
- 4 Well, do you know what, because I moved away from that 5 house and I had to go into rented accommodation. 6 I didn't actually get any mail, because everything 7 that was corresponding to the compensation was being 8 sent to the house that I no longer owned. I only 9 found this out because of Nick Wallis, to be honest, 10 because of the investigation he did with Panorama. 11 All of the letters was being sent to my previous
- 12 address. When did it come to your attention that the 13 Q.

Post Office --

- 15 A. June 2008. I was working on a temporary contract 16 through an agency at a heating company in Hull, and 17 a friend of mine rang me and he said, "Janet, you're 18 in the paper" and I went, "What do you mean? I'm in 19 the paper?" So he said, "Apparently, there's a 20 warrant out for your arrest" and I was on the front 21 page of the Hull Daily Mail and it was for non-payment 22 of compensation to the Post Office.
- 23 What did you do when you found out there was a warrant 24 for your arrest?
- 25 I contacted the warrant officer -- I can't remember A.

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1 his surname, but his name was Mike -- and he said, 2 "Obviously, there's been some form of 3 misunderstanding. Can you get proof of the sale?" So 4 I said, "Yeah, I can contact the solicitors". So 5 I went to the solicitors, got a copy of the sale and 6 that's when I found myself that all of the actual 7 money had gone to the mortgage company, and then -- so 8 then I had to hand myself in to a warrant, because 9 I had to answer for the warrant the following day. So 10 I had to go to Leeds Crown Court and hand myself in at 11 10.00 in the morning. 12 Q. What happened when you handed yourself in? 13 A. They handcuffed me and put me in cells for the day. 14 They basically told me I was looking at a five-year 15 jail sentence for non-payment of compensation. 16 Q. How was that issue resolved? 17 A. Well, I was being tried for the same thing in two 18

different courts because I also had to answer to the 19 warrant in Hull Crown Court for the same thing. So 20 then, obviously, my then legal team had to then get 21 the case combined because it was just one case but 22 I was being tried in two separate courts. But I then 23 had to do exactly the same thing I'd done the first 24 time round, was prove how much money I've got, prove 25 my bank accounts, borrow -- I had to borrow money 105

because they wanted £1,500 off me within 14 days. So I borrowed the money off my ex-husband to pay it.

And then the Post Office actually was -- well, the prosecution was happy, the fact that I hadn't had any money myself. So they settled it there and then. But the Post Office then kept that charge against me, so rather than going for the £11,000, they've gone for the £59,000, which is held against me personally. So if I come into any financial funds or anything that they can take that money back off me and, to this day -- I was talking about this outside, I've not actually received anything to say that that's been wiped.

So I mean, really, I could still owe that money to the Post Office and they could come after me for it anyway.

- You're saying that having brought confiscation proceedings against you for the £11,000, which related to costs, did it, of the criminal --
- 20 I don't know, it was just compensation, they was going 21
- 22 They then subsequently brought separate proceedings 23 against you in relation to this alleged shortfall of 24 £59.000?
- 25 A. Yes.

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1 Q. I'd like to ask you now a bit about the effect that 2 all of this has had on you?

3 A. Mm-hm.

4 Q. What was the immediate effect on your livelihood of 5 losing your Post Office salary?

6 A. Well, I lost my house, lost everything. I couldn't 7 get a job. Well, I couldn't get a job, couldn't go 8 for a job, because I didn't know if I still had a job, 9 or they was going to find out what had gone wrong and 10 reinstate me, which was a foolish thing to think. But 11 I just -- we just lost everything.

12 Q. When you were released from prison, did you have 13 difficulty finding work as a result of your 14 conviction?

15 A. I didn't apply for any jobs until the tag was 16 released. How can you go for a job interview when 17 you've got a tag on your ankle?

18 **Q.** What effect did it have on your health?

19 A. Four weeks after the court hearing had finished in 20 July 2008, I was working at this heating company and 21 I said to one of my friends, I said, "I don't feel 22 right". She went, "What do you mean?" I said, 23 "I just don't feel right". So we went to see the 24 nurse and she said, "If you don't think -- if you 25 don't feel right, go see your GP".

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So I went to see my GP. They didn't have anybody available, so they said, "If you think it's an emergency, go to A&E". So she drove me to A&E and, by the time I got to A&E, the full trunk of my body had disappeared. It was like it was gone. It was like I couldn't feel that it was there.

And I ended up in hospital for just under four months. I had fluid on my spinal cord in three separate areas and it paralysed me from the neck down and they told me I'd never walk again.

11 Q. What had caused this to happen to your body?

12 Just stress, my immune system was so low that my body 13 attacked itself.

14 Q. You did learn to walk again.

15 A. I did.

16 Q. When did you start being able to stand and walk for 17

18 **A.** To be fair, they tried to get me on my feet as soon as 19 possible, because all -- obviously my nerve endings 20 were damaged. I have temperature problems. I can't feel temperatures from my chest down. I can't feel 22 pain properly. I have problems with my hands. I have 23 chronic pain in my back all the time. If I took 24 medication for it to kill it off completely, 25 I probably wouldn't be sat here today.

- 1 Q. What impact has this had upon your ability to work?
- 2 A. I can't work. I just can't get a job because there's
- 3 days when I can't even get out of bed. It's destroyed
- 4 life. It's destroyed my life but, do you know what,
- 5 I'm a fighter and I'll fight through things.
- 6 Q. How have your children been affected by what happened 7 to you?
- 8 **A.** Do you know, we don't speak about it, and we genuinely
- 9 don't speak about it, and we never speak about me
- 10 being in jail. It's just easier not to talk about
- 11 what's happened, rather than to keep going over what's
- 12 happened.
- 13 Q. You have described reporting of your conviction in the 14 press.
- 15 A. Yes.
- 16 **Q.** How is your standing in the community affected by your 17 prosecution and conviction?
- 18 A. People whisper. You always get the people that say,
- "Oh, what did she do with the money? You can see 19
- 20 she's lived a high life" and -- because you obviously
- 21 live in a nice house or you drive a nice car, people
- 22 just assume that's what you've done.
- 23 Q. When did you discover that you were not the only
- 24 subpostmistress to have experienced problems with
- 25 Horizon?

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- It was to do with Seema Misra's case. I heard about 1
- 2 her case on the news, so I contacted Shoosmiths
- 3 Solicitors and they put me in touch with the JFSA, and 4 that was in 2011/2012.
- 5
- Q. How did you feel to discover that others had been 6 affected like you?
- 7 At first, I was angry but I was also relieved, because
- 8 it was good to know that -- although you don't want
- 9 this to happen to anybody, but it was good to know 10 that it was happening to other people as well.
- 11 **Q.** You were one of the 555 Claimants in the Group
- 12 Litigation?
- 13 A. I was part of the mediation scheme, as well, which was
- 14 147, which was from 2012 to 2015, and was shut down by
- 15 the Post Office because of the Second Sight report
- 16 that they didn't like.
- 17 Q. Did you receive any compensation as a result of the
- 18 mediation scheme?
- 19 A. No. the Post Office refused to mediate me.
- 20 Q. Why was that?
- 21 A. I don't know. They just didn't feel that I had a case
- 22 to be mediated. That was during the mediation scheme
 - in 2015.
- 24 What steps did you take to the overturn your Q.
- 25 conviction?

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- A. Well, that was -- I joined the GLO, so I was part of 1
 - the Group Litigation and then to have -- when we won
- 3 the Group Litigation in 2019 I'd already submitted my
- 4 case to the CCRC in 2015, anyway, but because of --
- 5 they wanted outcomes of the GLO, obviously, because we
- 6 won six judgments in total. They then waited
- 7 five years before they would make a decision, and
- 8 then, obviously, then they referred my case to the
- 9 Court of Appeal.
- 10 Q. When did you discover that your case was being
- 11 referred to the Court of Appeal?
- 12 A. 24 March 2020.
- 13 Q. Your conviction was quashed on 23 April?
- 14 A. I was, yes.
- 15 Q. On both grounds?
- 16 A. Yes, which myself, Tracy and Seema all decided to take
- 17 for Limb 2, and we had an excellent legal team,
- 18 Paul Marshall, Flora Page, Nick Gould. I mean, them
- 19 two there, the two barristers, almost had their
- 20 careers trashed because of Brian Altman, who brought 21 contempt of court hearings against them.
- 22 **Q.** How did you feel when your conviction was quashed?
- 23 Absolutely elated. I couldn't -- do you know what, if
- 24 I could have bottled that experience on that day and

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25 the joy that it brought, I would have just kept it.

- Who was present with you at the time when you 1 2 discovered?
- 3 A. Tracy, Seema, Flora. Paul was isolating, Nick was
- 4 there, Dav was there, the majority of people in this
 - room was there, to be honest.
- 6 Q. Was your daughter with you?
- 7 Yes, yes, she was, yes. That was a special moment,
 - that was.
- 9 Q. Why was that important to you?
- 10 A. Because I've protected them from it for such a long
- 11 time and then for her to be able to share that day was
- 12 just amazing.
- 13 Q. How do you now feel after everything you've gone
- 14 through about the way that you were treated by the
- 15 Post Office?
- 16 A. I don't really want to say that, to be honest. It
- 17 wouldn't be a nice way of putting it.
- 18 **Q.** Do you think that more needs to be done?
- 19 Absolutely. Do I sit here and think if it hadn't been
- 20 for the fact that we fought for Limb 2 and won Limb 2,
- 21 would this Inquiry have its statutory power, or would
- 22 it just have been another inquiry that would have just
- 23 gone through the process and then nothing comes back
- 24 from it? There's too many people involved in what's
- 25 gone wrong, either it be within the Government, the

1		Royal Mail, the Post Office, the legal system, the	1	MS HODGE: Thank you very much. Sir, are there any	
2		defences, the legal teams. So many people that have	2	questions you would like to ask Ms Skinner?	
3		wronged all these people and destroyed so many	3	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, I don't want to ask her any	
4		people's lives. We need answers from it.	4	questions but I would like to say a few words to her.	
5	Q.	I don't have any further questions for you,	5	She was one of the first people I met when we were	
6		Ms Skinner. Is there anything you'd like to say to	6	a non-statutory inquiry. It was you, Mr Pound, and	
7		the Chair that we've not already covered in your	7	Ms Arch, was it not?	
8		evidence?	8	A. It was, yes.	
9	A.	People think that we're here because of money and	9	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: You told me then something of what you	ı
10		people automatically think that all we're bothered	10	said today and you set me on a train of investigation,	
11		about is compensation. The only thing that	11	which still has a long way to go. So thank you very	
12		compensation will ever change is our financial	12	much for participating in the way that you have in all	
13		stability.	13	phases of this Inquiry.	
14		We've got a life sentence for what's been done.	14	A. Thank you.	
15		We will never erase memories of what's happened over	15	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I think, too, I want to say something	
16		these past 20 years, and it won't. We've got to live	16	directly to the lawyers who assisted the three	
17		with that. But yet you get the people at the top who	17	witnesses today.	
18		just basically say "I'm sorry, we made a mistake".	18	When I made my opening remarks, ten days ago	
19		You made a mistake by destroying people. Do you know,	19	now, I thanked the lawyers who had assisted the people	
20		Seema was right in what she said, there is a split	20	who had provided witness statements and who were going	
21		between them and us. So why is it the people at the	21	to give oral evidence, and that was addressed	
22		top think they have more power? What makes them above	22	obviously, primarily at that time, to the lawyers who	
23		the law, above anybody else? If we break the law, we	23	were in the room, and I don't think Mr Gould or	
24		get penalised. They're breaking the law and nothing	24	Ms Page or Mr Marshall were in the room.	
25		comes of it.	25	So I'd like to tell them publicly that I'm very	
		113		114	_
1		thankful to all the laureers who have assisted the	1	INDEX	
1		thankful to all the lawyers who have assisted the	1		4
2		people who have had so many difficulties over the	2	STEPHANIE REILLY, statement summarised by	1
3	MC	years. Thank you.	3	MR STEIN, QC	C
4	IVIO	6 HODGE: Thank you, sir. That concludes our evidence	4	TRACY FELSTEAD (affirmed)	6
5		today and this week. We will be resuming in Cardiff	5	Questioned by MR BEER	6
6	CIL	on Tuesday.	6	SEEMA MISRA (affirmed)	35
7	SIF	R WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, and in advance of you all coming	7	Examined by MR BEER JANET LOUISE SKINNER (affirmed)	35 88
8		to Cardiff, croeso y Cymru or croeso i Gymru I'd forgotten my mutation and I will see you all in	8		88
9		•	9	Questioned by MS HODGE	00
10	(2.4	Wales.	10		
11	(2.	12 pm)	11		
12		(Adjourned until 11.00 am on Tuesday, 1 March 2022)	12		
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