

INTERVIEW PENELOPE SPENCER, 28 APRIL 2011

Downey: I'm Paul Downey, I'm an investigator from the Ministry of Social Development. Here with me today is –

Smith: Ashley Smith.

Downey: And?

Hyland: Clark Hyland.

Downey: And we are talking to –

Spencer: Penelope Spencer.

Downey: Penelope, we want to talk to you about how you witnessed the collapse of the CTV building, so what I'd like you to do is go back to the day that it happened and if you can just tell me from the moment you actually started witnessing the collapse of the building, just take me through those next few minutes. Tell me in as much detail as you can and in your own words and in your own time exactly what it was that you saw.

Spencer: Okay, well me and Tom Walker were coming back from lunch and we'd just been to the dairy which is diagonally across the road next to Devine Café from CTV and we were just walking back across the road, sort of in front of the CTV driveway, sort of going into the CTV driveway, heading in there, and we were halfway across the road, and all of a sudden there was this massive jolt and I think it was the initial jolt, and we sort of like stopped and grabbed each other. Yeah, I'm pretty sure we grabbed each other and I think we sort of like started looking around us because it kept – it started going again, just shaking really really bad, and we were sort of looking around us and like the CTV building was just sort of swaying. That's what I can remember it as – swaying towards us and back and forward, and I was just stunned, absolutely stunned, and the IRD building – we were like looking back and forwards going "which one's going to go?" because the IRD – the windows were just coming out like – the windows were just like jelly. It was absolutely crazy. And um, then all of a sudden – I think it was the fourth floor of the CTV building just gave way. The pillars, like all the glass shattered and then just I think the pillars just gave way on the outside. I'm not sure about the inside. And then the floor came down and it hit – as it hit the next floor down, it sort of stopped for like half a second and then it dropped again to the next floor down, and it just continued all the way down to the ground, but the fifth floor, I'm pretty sure that stayed intact until it hit the rubble at the bottom. Yeah, and then I was screaming and everything, and Tom was like "calm down, calm down, calm down" and then I sort of got away from him and raced up to the rubble, like into the carpark straight up to the front of the building because it came down so straight that Tom's car was parked the second carpark across from Madras Street and right in front of the building and it only really knocked his bumper off. It came down that straight, it was absolutely crazy, so I raced up to the rubble. Tom was like trying to drag me away because the lift shafts were still standing

and I was yelling people's names and stuff. Then I ran around to the other side of the building, the back corner on Madras Street because that's where I thought Bish might be because he'd been sort of wandering back and forwards because I'd been on reception earlier that day. He'd been sort of back and forwards between upstairs and the back of the building so I wasn't sure if he was there, but that's where I thought he might be, so I was like screaming his name, but I couldn't think of anyone else. I don't know why. That was the first name that came to my head. And then we found Maryanne and Sasha and stuff. But apart from that I don't really remember much. But yeah, it was just [unclear] fourth floor collapsing.

Downey: Let's go back to that bit, you were saying about you saw pillars collapsing. Can you describe that a bit more. How did they –

Spencer: I think the concrete sort of just crumbled or it exploded, I'm not sure. I can't really remember much detail about that.

Smith: Where was that? Up on the fourth floor, the fifth floor or something?

Spencer: Fourth floor. It was the second floor down from the top anyway.

Hyland: Second floor down from the top, so you had the roof, the top floor and then – is that the next floor down, that floor?

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: That collapsed?

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: That's where the clinic was I think.

Spencer: Yes, I believe the clinic was on the fourth floor which is where – which collapsed first.

Hyland: So just in terms of how – we're calling the ground level 1 and the top floor level 6.

Spencer: Okay, okay.

Hyland: So level 6 is where the relationship services was.

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: And then the next one down would be the clinic.

Spencer: Yes, so it would have been where the clinic was, on say level 5.

Hyland: So the level 6 floor collapsed down onto the level 5 floor.

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: That would be right.

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: Those columns collapsed there, and then they progressively collapsed.

Spencer: Yes.

Downey: *Oh hang on, sorry that's not my understanding of what you were saying.*

Spencer: Okay, sorry.

Downey: *So you were saying that what you're calling level 4 which we're saying is level 5 –*

Spencer: Yes.

Downey: *So that's the one you saw collapse first.*

Spencer: Yes. So there was one floor on top of it that stayed intact all the way down.

Downey: *But they all came down at the same time. Level 6 didn't stay in the air momentarily after the floor underneath it collapsed.*

Spencer: Level 6 stayed intact all the way down to like where –

Smith: *But it was falling.*

Spencer: Yes.

Smith: *And then it squashed.*

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: *So it dropped onto – it dropped as a unit. Is that what you're saying? It dropped as a unit down onto level 5.*

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: *And then level 5 dropped down onto the ones below.*

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: *Collapsed down.*

Spencer: Yes, and then I guess it must have been the roof that sort of collapsed onto Level 6 when it hit the rubble.

Smith: *On that side of the building there was an escape stair that went up.*

Spencer: Yes.

Smith: *With a solid wall in behind it. Did you notice anything about that wall, what happened to that wall? Was it the floors that were collapsing around it?*

Spencer: I didn't notice anything about that wall. I don't remember seeing the stairs at all to be honest. Yeah, sorry, I can't be of help there.

Hyland: *When you went around to Madras Street, you ran around there, what did you see on the street there when you went around there?*

Spencer: I actually have no idea.

Hyland: *Can't remember.*

- Spencer: No idea. That sort of – some of it's a blur. Like that's pretty crazy, but yeah. No sorry, I can't.
- Hyland: *That's okay.*
- Spencer: Don't know what was there. No idea. I was pulled away pretty quickly because Tom was like "we're not staying here, like not with the lift shaft" and he didn't know if it would come down or not, but it's amazing that that thing's still standing. Like if anyone had been in the toilet I'm pretty sure the toilets are still standing, like they would have been safe which is mind-boggling really. It's crazy, it's a pity no-one was in the toilet because – oh yeah, also when the building collapsed all the water pipes burst and just you know, there was water pouring out onto the pile of rubble.
- Hyland: *Oh out of the –*
- Spencer: Out of like, I think it was either level 5 or 6, the pipes there. There was just – like had pipes hanging down and they're probably still there actually but there was water pouring out of them onto the rubble.
- Hyland: *Oh okay [unclear] a core area, so the pipes coming out of the elevator core –*
- Spencer: Yes.
- Hyland: *And they'd ruptured and there was water coming out.*
- Spencer: Yes.
- Hyland: *Around about level 5.*
- Spencer: Yes.
- Downey: *[Unclear] diagrams and thinking about what she saw?*
- Hyland: *Is it worth just drawing – just confirming that – just drawing a picture of the levels coming down, just so that we've got that.*
- Downey: *How's your artistic talent?*
- Spencer: Absolutely no good. I've already had to do one of these for the police.
- Downey: *Oh, have you?*
- Spencer: Something along – more like a floor plan but yeah, and it wasn't good.
- Downey: *Okay, here you go.*
- Spencer: Okay, so what exactly do you want me to draw.
- Downey: *Clark might explain that better.*
- Smith: *Take Tom's drawings away.*

Hyland: So if you just draw the levels, so you've got the ground level – we'll call that Level 1 and then just work your work up to Level 6 and the roof and then just identify where you first saw the columns collapse.

Spencer: Okay, yeah, I can do that.

Hyland: So as you're drawing it, perhaps if you can just describe what it was that you saw.

Spencer: Yes, okay. Okay, basically what I saw was these pillars here collapse, these two here.

Hyland: Oh okay.

Spencer: That's what I'm pretty sure I saw, and I'm not too sure about – I'm pretty sure there were two more here but I'm not sure about them. I just don't remember that bit there, but I remember that bit there, and when it came down, like this floor here, that came down and stopped about there, for about half a second, and then dropped again to that floor, and then that dropped and continued onto the pile of rubble at the bottom, and then this bit sort of collapsed onto this floor where when it was at the bottom.

Hyland: Oh okay, the roof, yeah.

Spencer: Is that okay?

Hyland: Yes, that's good. You know the columns that you saw, the first ones collapse –

Spencer: Yes.

Hyland: Did they go out or kick out or did they – any sort of –

Spencer: I think they sort of went out.

Hyland: Kicked out perhaps.

Spencer: I think so. Yeah, I'm pretty sure they did. Yeah.

Hyland: That's great.

Downey: Thanks. I'll just get you to put your name on the bottom of that.

Spencer: Do you need me to sign it too?

Downey: Yeah, why not? It could be worth something one day.

Spencer: My artwork – sell it on TradeMe.

Hyland: No worries, that would be cool so that was 5 – we'll call that 5.

Spencer: Do you want me to label them all?

Hyland: Yeah, it's just if you label the floors so that's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Thanks for that. Excellent. That's great. Thank you for that.

Downey: Any more questions?

Hyland: *No.*

Downey: *Is there anything else that you can think of that you think might be relevant?*

Spencer: *Not at this stage, no.*

Downey: *Okay, thanks for your time, Penelope, it's now 12.02.*