

The Case of N's Wife

N is a 63 year old ex-miner and his wife was a secretary for the local Health Care Trust. Married for forty years with two children, both enjoyed being involved in the lives of their eight grandchildren. They did most things together and their main interests were entering their pedigree dogs into shows around the country and taking walks in a nearby forest.

Friday 19th March 2004 was a dry fine day. N was preparing a favourite meal for his wife, due home from work at about 5.45 pm. She never arrived.

By 6.15 pm N, now beside himself with worry, was informed by his granddaughter that there had been a crash on the A*** and that some of the nearby roads were blocked. He had a dreadful feeling that something was very wrong. He immediately rang the local Police Station to ask if they had any information about the crash and who was involved. The Police asked whom he was inquiring about, then replied they would get back to him if they found out anything.

N felt that he could not just sit and do nothing, so he got into his van and set off to drive the four miles to the crash site. Whilst on his journey, a Police car passed him going in the opposite direction; thoughts went through his mind 'I wonder if that car is going to my home'.

He arrived at a roundabout near the crash site; it was blocked by a police patrol vehicle. The Police officer came over to N's van. N asked if he knew what vehicle had been involved in the accident. The officer asked his name and requested that he pull over to the side. N sat for seven or eight minutes watching the officer talking on his radio. The first Police car he had seen earlier then arrived and pulled up to the side of his van. N was invited to sit in the rear of the second police car and **was told that his wife had died in the crash. After a couple of minutes, he was asked was he ok to drive? N then drove his van back home, followed by the second Police car.**

When N arrived home, his daughter-in-law was waiting for him. N was distraught and unable to take in what the Police were telling him; he could not believe that his wife was dead. The police informed him that he had to go with them to the nearest hospital to see his wife and identify her. N, who was in an extreme emotional state, pleaded with the Police. **He felt he could not deal with identification that night, but was told he must.**

They were put into a police car and driven to the hospital where they were dumped in A & E by the Police Officer, who then left. **No one came to them to ask who they were, what they were waiting for, or informed them what was happening or why there was a delay.**

After an hour and ten minutes, the Police Officer reappeared and said: "Sorry, mate, we are at the wrong place, we should be in the Mortuary car park". They then got back into the patrol car and were driven round to the Mortuary car park, where **they were left sitting in the car for over another hour. in the darkness.**

Eventually another car came onto the car park, pulled up outside the mortuary and flashed its lights at the Police car. N told the Police Officer: "I **can't take much more;**

I'm feeling ill with shock." He said again that he was petrified about having to identify his wife.

*A man, thought to be a Mortuary technician, then approached the Police car passenger window where N was sitting and said, "Do you want to see her now?" The Police officer interjected: "No, we'll wait for the traffic officer". The man then said: **"Personally, I think it should be left until Monday.**" N said: **"What are you trying to tell me?"** and the man replied, **"Well, she's not a pretty sight"**.*

N had voiced his reluctance to view his wife at least twice that night, but because of the comments of the Police Officer earlier, he had been led to believe it was the only legal way of identification.

*N again voiced his reluctance, but the Police officer then said to N: **"Sorry it has to be done tonight. It is Friday evening and it must be completed before the weekend"**. They then sat for another 15 minutes in the back of the police car.*

The Traffic Officer they had been waiting for then arrived and they were taken into the mortuary where N was asked questions and personal details about his wife.

*N was then asked was he ready, and was led to a side room. He had no doubt that it was his wife, though, in his words, "it didn't look like her." Part of her forehead, which was injured, was covered with a piece of white cloth and was still bloody. He kissed her. He registered in his mind that a large bunch of plastic flowers had been laid across his wife's body. After some time had passed N asked about his wife's clothes. He **was told: "you wouldn't want to see them"**. But later he was given her handbag. When he opened it, he was appalled to find **his wife's glasses pushed inside, still splattered with blood.***

They were then driven home by the Police Officer. After being given a "blue binder", the Police Officer left, telling them not to read it for two or three days.

*N sat with several members of his family for a time and they left after N assured them he would be alright. **He then spent the next six hours between 12.30 am and 6.30 am, repeatedly redialling his wife's work's answer-phone, just to hear her voice.** His daughter-in-law stayed with him all night.*

*At 6.30 am, N rang the Police station to **beg them not to do a Post Mortem**; he couldn't bear the thought of it and couldn't see the need; it was dear she had died of her injuries. **He was told by the Officer who answered the phone that "she is no longer your wife"**.*

*The following morning, Saturday, N's son arrived and **found his father distraught at the Officer's comment about "she is no longer your wife"**. On the Monday, his son rang the Police to complain and the following day an Inspector and a WPC came to his home. The Inspector told N that the Officer had said the wrong thing, but it wasn't meant "like that". He also confirmed that N did not have to make a "visual" identification.*

*The Monday was three days after his wife's death and N decided to ring the hospital and plead with the senior technician not to do a post mortem. The Senior Technician thought N was ringing about the identification and asked N, **"Are you coming down this***

afternoon?" N replied: **"I have already identified her, I was brought down on Friday"**. The Technician was astounded, saying: **"You're joking, there is no way you should have been allowed to see her like this."** He further added: **"Those bloody coppers and their paperwork"**.

Although N had protested, a most mortem was carried out. No-one had explained that this is normal practice after traumatic deaths and a coroner does not need the consent of next-of-kin. But, N should have been told when and where the post mortem would take place and that he could have a medical representative present.

One week later his beloved wife was laid to rest. The week following the funeral, a WPC called at N's home, introducing herself as a Family Liaison Officer (FLO). She had a conversation with N lasting about ten minutes.

The FLO rang him a week or so later. N told her he had burned the blue binder that he had been given on the night of his wife's death because the information it contained said he did not have to make a visual identification, which he had been forced to do. The FLO said she would call again and would bring another "blue binder". She duly arrived the following day. As she came into the house, her mobile phone rang and, ignoring N, she answered it, saying to the caller: "I won't be a minute". N was angry at this and told her "Don't let me keep you". The FLO handed him another blue binder and left. This was also burned. He never saw an FLO again.

N's wife had left her work at the usual time. It is thought she decided to stop at a garden centre on her way home as it was Mother's Day in two days time. She had rejoined the main road and had reached her carriage way when her car was hit by a speeding coach, travelling at over 60 mph in the opposite direction. The speed limit for a coach on that stretch of road is 50 mph.

The coach hit Mrs N's car on the driver's door. Emergency services arrived within minutes, but it took three and a half hours to free Mrs N. N was told his wife had died instantly.

The driver of the coach was giving an ex-colleague, who was sat in the co-driver's seat, a lift. They had commented to each other about the "near miss" the coach had had with another car a few seconds earlier. The driver of this car came forward later.

N had made it clear to the Police right from the start that he wanted to be involved with the judicial process surrounding his wife's death. He was assured that he would be informed. Despite all the reassurances, N received a phone call from an officer some weeks later and was told that the driver had been charged. N asked when the case would go to court and he was informed that the case had been in court the day before. It was over and done with!

The driver was fined £60 and given three penalty points.

THIS CATALOGUE OF UNBELIEVABLE AND SHOCKINQLY INSENSITIVE AND INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT OF N HAS LEFT HIM SEVERELY DEPRESSED, DISILLUSIONED AND OBSESSIONAL ABOUT HIS DREADFUL TREATMENT BY ALL CONCERNED. THE IGNORANCE OF THE LAW WITH RESPECT TO IDENTIFICATION AND POST MORTEMMS AND THE 'INCONVENIENCE' OF A

TRAUMATIC DEATH ON A FRIDAY ARE EQUALLY SHOCKING. THE ASSURANCES OF THE POLICE TO KEEP N INFORMED MEANT NOTHING.

THIS STORY IS NOT AN ISOLATED ONE, NOR IS THE SENTENCE, WHICH REFLECTS THE ATTITUDE OF OUR SOCIETY TO LOSS OF LIFE ON GREAT BRITAIN'S ROADS.