

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

(Criminal Procedure Rules R16.2, Criminal Justice Act 1967 S9)

NICHE Ref No: 24000659041  
**Statement of:** GARY POLAND  
Age (if under 18): N/A

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature

**SIGNATURE**

Date: 29-07-2024

I am Gary POLAND and I live at an address known to MERSEYSIDE POLICE. I am making this statement in relation to an incident that I have been witness to, today, on Monday the 29th of July 2024.

In this statement I will discuss the nature of my employment, and a chronological account of the awful events I have witnessed today.

I am a private hire taxi driver for ONE CALL TAXIS. I have been in this position with ONE CALL for approximately 27 years. I am an experienced taxi driver, and I am particularly familiar with the NORTH SEFTON area of MERSEYSIDE , which includes the areas of FORMBY and SOUTHPORT. The ONE CALL booking system is all managed through an app installed on drivers' mobile phones. When I receive a booking, for instance, my phone alert will alert me to a 'job' - I will then be shown the pickup address and the drop off address - if the customer has specified a drop off address, that is - sometimes this will not be present. I would then be afforded the opportunity to accept or decline the booking via the use of a green accept button or a red reject button. I often will decline to accept bookings that have not specified a drop off address as I like to know how far I'll be going, I tend to stay local to the SOUTHPORT area as of recent.

Today, on Monday the 29th of July 2024, I was on duty as a taxi driver, waiting to receive bookings.

At 11:14 AM, I received notification via my phone app booking system of a booking at '10 OLD SCHOOL CLOSE, BANKS, PR9 8SB'. The instructions were to take this customer to '34A HART STREET, SOUTHPORT PR8 6'. The passenger was listed as 'SIMON'. I exhibit a photograph of the booking details as GP/01. The booking person asked to pay in cash and the approximate fair was £9.70. The booking number was 18320883.

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I accepted this booking, having been pleased that it was local with a specified destination, I then made my way to the address. I estimate that I arrived at 10 OLD SCHOOL CLOSE, BANKS at approximately 11:25 AM.

Upon arriving at the address, I manoeuvred my car so that I could drive off with ease, this meant that the address was to my left hand / passenger side. I awaited the arrival of the customer. I believed the houses in this area belonged to some sort of housing association or council housing, this is due to my experiences of customers from the same area. I did not see the customer exit his address, his presence only became known to me when he entered my vehicle , he was sat in the rear of the vehicle, directly behind the front passenger seat, and diagonally behind myself in the driver's seat.

For the remainder of this statement, I will refer to this customer as MALE ONE. As MALE ONE sat in my taxi, I immediately noticed a few distinguishing features of his person. MALE ONE was wearing a 'Covid' fabric face mask. I could see beyond this that he was a black male. MALE ONE was wearing a light blue, possibly grey coloured hoodie which was covering his head and ears, this extended down to his body, and was zipped up across his chest. I assumed the male was a carer, owing to me dealing with a lot of carer customers who still opt to wear ' Covid' face masks. I got the impression that MALE ONE was not very talkative, and so I did not seek to engage him in much conversation.

I did however, ask him , so as to confirm the journey information "IS IT 34A HART STREET MATE YEAH?" to which MALE ONE replied "YEAH". I cannot say whether or not he had any specific type of accent, local to MERSEYSIDE or otherwise.

MALE ONE had what appeared to be a very 'low technology' type phone, it appeared to be very cheap. I now think this was very odd as recalling this incident in hindsight, I remember that I was later informed by ONE CALL TAXIS that this was an 'app' booking - I do not believe his phone was advanced enough to use apps or download them but of course I do not know the specifics of the phone.

I drove MALE ONE to his destination, as per the booking. The journey was completely silent as MALE ONE and I did not talk any further. I estimate the journey was approximately 12 - 15 minutes. Eventually, I would arrive via SUSSEX ROAD, turning right onto MAPLE STREET which brought me onto HART STREET. I estimate it was approximately around 11:40 - 11:45 AM that I arrived at the destination with MALE ONE.

We then turned into HART STREET and MALE ONE pointed towards the destination. MALE ONE said something to the effect of "IS THAT IT?". The male then exited the taxi and headed toward a car business address, I thought he was heading to my friend's business , MASTERS SPRAY SHOP - as this was immediately next to 34A HART STREET. My best friend of 40 years, JULIAN MEDLOCK, runs this business - I thought that this was a strange coincidence.

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At this point I was persistently asking MALE ONE "ARE YOU PAYING CARD OR CASH? HOW ARE YOU PAYING ME?" as this male had effectively made off from me without paying. MALE ONE kept heading away from me, ignoring my honest questions. It appeared that MALE ONE was doing something with his arm or his hoodie, he appeared to be holding this tightly and not swinging his arms whilst he walked. MALE ONE headed toward's JULIAN's business.

It was at this point that I observed that MALE ONE was approximately 5ft 6inches tall, his build was slight and slim, and viewing his face between the mask and hood, I would estimate he was aged approximately 17 - 20 years ago. Although I am aware I did not see this male's full face, I believe I would be able to recognise this male if I saw him again, owing to his small build, short height and very dark black skin.

It was then that I sighted another person I know, COLIN PARRY, who is JULIAN's business partner. COLIN was stood with another male who I assume was a customer, I will refer to this male as MALE TWO. COLIN and MALE TWO must have heard me talking about the missed fare, as MALE TWO immediately, verbally came to my aid - MALE TWO shouted toward MALE ONE saying "PAY THE DRIVER, PAY THE DRIVER".

It was at this point that MALE ONE changed direction, and began walking towards the steps that lead to 34A HART STREET, I know this building used to be a large gym but I know understand it is used as a hall for hire for various local events. I thought this was very strange, MALE ONE walked past me to cross from MASTERS SPRAY SHOP to 34A HART STREET, I held out hope he was going to fetch me cash. I asked him one final time "ARE YOU PAYING ME OR WHAT?" - He did not respond.

MALE ONE then walked up the stairs at the entrance to 34A HART STREET, it was at this point that I believed I wasn't getting paid. I remained parked up as I awaited the next taxi 'job'. I waited around 20 seconds.

It was at this moment that everything had taken a turn for the absolute worst. I began to hear what I believed were 4 to 5 gunshots, sudden cracking pounding bangs that emanated out into the street. I was absolutely horrified, and fearful for my life. My stomach 'dropped' and I believed that this male had started shooting people, the bangs were terrible and sudden.

This was followed by the most awful sound, an orchestra of blood curdling screams filled the air. Scream after scream pierced my ears, the screams sounded like a mixture of young and old, male and female. This was terrifying, I was in a state of complete mortal terror and shock.

I then saw a massed huddle of children, aged approximately 6 or 7 years old, stumble and run in a panicked hurry out of 34A HART STREET. They were screaming, it was like a stampede for their lives. I could not describe these children any further.

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I then feared for my own life, I thought MALE ONE was going to harm me because I was shouting at him asking for his taxi money. I immediately made my way away from the scene in my vehicle.

I was in a state of shock, I called my friend JULIAN as I referred to previously in this statement, in order to tell him to mind his safety and keep indoors. JULIAN said something to the effect of "IT LOOKS LIKE HE HAS CUT PEOPLE WITH A KNIFE" , he seemed shaken up but I cannot say what else we talked about or what JULIAN himself saw.

In what I can assume was a state of shock, I accepted another taxi booking taking a woman from DPA I estimate this journey took around 10 minutes. This woman sat directly behind me and did not sit where MALE ONE had sat.

I immediately realised I was in shock and thought to myself, what was I doing. I immediately returned to my home address, told my wife what had happened and then called the ONE CALL TAXI call centre to make sure the booking details were correct for the journey with MALE ONE. These details were verified as correct via the call centre. I then called MERSEYSIDE POLICE to let them know about what I had seen.

I was in close proximity to MALE ONE as he was sat in the back of my vehicle, I estimate I was with him for approximately 25 minutes in total, this includes picking him up, the car journey and then observing him walking around as I asked him for my money for the taxi fare. I was no further than a foot or so away from MALE ONE in distance when he was in the back of my car. When I was asking him about my fare, I estimate he was approximately 5-8 feet away. My visibility of this male was clear as there was ample daylight throughout the day. My vision of MALE ONE was obstructed however owing to the covid face mask he was wearing. I had never seen this male before prior to this incident but I believe I would recognise him again. It has been approximately 5 hours since this incident occurred and me giving this statement to MERSEYSIDE POLICE.

My vehicle registration is DPA , a white TOYOTA HYBRID CHR. This is the vehicle that I have used as a taxi to take MALE ONE to 34A HART STREET from his home address.

I am willing to assist MERSEYSIDE POLICE in whatever way I can, I am willing for this statement to be read in a court of law if necessary.

I have a 'lower range' dashcam in my vehicle, I believe this may have captured MALE ONE and perhaps some of the incident - I give full permission to MERSEYSIDE POLICE for them to seize my dash camera and forensically examine my vehicle.

My heart is broken for the children whose lives have been ruined by this tragedy, this is a harrowing , life changing event.

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