

Evidence for the parliamentary inquiry on detention. Written by Dee Taft, submitted on her behalf by Right to Remain.

Introduction:

1. I am a Canadian citizen my husband is a British Citizen. We have been married for over 7 years. We settled in Canada for a few years but my husband had to return to the UK and I remained in Canada. In May 2012 after my adult children had moved out and were settled I went to join my husband in UK and was there for 6 months. Due to changes in Immigration rules I had to return back to Canada in November 2012.

My arrival in the U.K.

2. I arrived at Gatwick Airport – South Terminal on Tuesday 22nd October 2013, excited because I knew my husband was going to be waiting for me in the Arrivals Hall after I hadn't seen him for eleven months. I approached passport control and handed my passport over, and the lady asked me how long I was staying. I told her I'd be in the UK six weeks, leaving for the Philippines for a few weeks, then returning for three months before moving to Ireland with my husband. She asked if I had a ticket to the Philippines with me, and I told her that my son was booking it in the next few weeks. My son is in the Canadian military and was at that time away on military exercises and would be booking both his and my tickets upon his return home.

3. The lady said she needed to talk to her Supervisor to get clarification, and at 10.45am I was placed in a little glass-walled waiting room that is locked from the outside, with everyone going past wondering what you've done to get put into holding. I was sure I had done nothing wrong, but it sure makes you feel guilty when you see people looking at you like you're a criminal. It makes you feel humiliated and slightly intimidated not to mention scared of what was happening.

Questioning at the Airport:

4. At 11.15am, a different lady came to get me. Not at all helpful or friendly, but very demanding and intimidating. I was asked if I had any luggage other than my carry-on, and I said yes, I had one suitcase. I was escorted to baggage where I collected my suitcase, then escorted through the airport to a detention centre elsewhere in the terminal. Before being put into a new holding area, I was asked to empty my bags and watched as this lady went through all my stuff and put anything paper in a plastic bag, and my medication in another.. When she was satisfied, I was told to repack my bags (no help offered), I was escorted to a detention area. When I asked what was happening, the lady escorting me said that Immigration were not satisfied with my answers, and that they had more questions for me. Check-in time at the detention area was 11.30am

5. The staff in the holding area were nice and tried to make me feel at ease. I had not been able to talk to anyone, and asked the lady holding room staff if I could make a phone call. She asked if it was a UK number, I said yes, and she allowed me to call my husband as well she gave me a number in the holding room so that he could call me back. When I spoke to him he stated that YES someone had contacted him and that they were going to be wanting to interview me before they made a decision about my situation.

6. I finally got called out to have my picture and fingerprints taken, then placed in a very small room that had chains on some of the chairs, where I waited some more. An

Immigration Officer arrived with a list of 106 questions already prepared, most of which didn't seem relevant to me for visiting my husband in Wales. She asked why I had not moved to the UK with him in February 2011, and I explained that it was due to working, money and wanting to ensure that my sons were settled before I left. She seemed to think that ensuring my twenty-two year old son had somewhere to live was a bad thing. Having been the only constant all my son lives I had to make sure for myself they were both settled and OK before I left the country to live elsewhere. When the interview was concluded, I was taken back to the holding room. I still had no idea what was happening or going to happen. I was hoping that everything would be okay and I would soon be reunited with my husband.

7. About thirty minutes later, at approximately 2.15pm, David called to say that he'd been informed that I was being denied entry to the UK because they believed I would overstay if allowed entry. I was to be returned to Canada on the next flight the following day. Why they'd tell him before me is beyond my comprehension, and it should have been me telling my husband, not the other way around. At 4.30pm, the Immigration Officer returned and told me that they are aware that I have spoken to my husband and that I know I'm being refused entry to the UK with no right of appeal. Shortly after this, I was told that I would be taken to Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre at 5pm.

Travelling to Detention:

8. My bags and I were escorted to a waiting van, where I was told to get inside. The van has windows but no door handle on the inside, and a glass pane between the driver and detainee areas with a small window that they open to talk to you.. After a trip of around five minutes, I was transferred to a different van and we went on our way. When we picked up another detainee around 2 hours into the journey, we were taken out, searched and made to wait in another holding area. The bathroom facilities had no toilet seat and was a tiny room. Upon leaving this facility, we were again searched, and put back in the van before continuing the journey.

9. At around 9pm, we arrived at our new location. Four hours from Gatwick to just outside Heathrow, a trip that usually takes around an hour at most, where we're told to sit and wait. I asked permission to call my husband, which they allowed, and they also gave me a number for him to be able to call me back.. I told him I hoped he at least knew where I was, and to go back home to Wales as I was being put on a flight the next day..

Arrival in Detention:

10. We had a nurse on site, he checked my blood pressure and as it was really high I was taken upstairs by elevator while the other detainees took the stairs. At 11.30pm, I was finally finished processing and as I'd been awake thirty-two hours already and my blood pressure was high, I took a shower and went to bed in my cell. The shower stall doors barely cover anything and the water kept going off every few minutes. After I hoped to be able to go to sleep, but I started being sick every fifteen to twenty minutes. I continued being sick every few minutes until approximately 3:30 am.

Isolation and denied access to personal belongings:

11. During processing on arrival, you're fingerprinted and photographed again, and have a chance to get clothes and toiletries from your bags, but nothing that could be used as a weapon or has a camera. While in the detention center was told could get access to my

luggage at any time if needed things out of it. In the morning, when I found out I was being held for another day, I asked if could get things out of my luggage both for my extra day stay as well as to send home with my husband and I was told yes just gives us a few minutes. 5 hours later when my husband arrived still no luggage kept getting told they are really busy and you have to be patient. I realize I am not the only person there but seems to me that 5 hours is a little long just to be able to get access to MY luggage. The female staff member got rather upset when I asked for the 4th time about being able to get my stuff and stated that as Colbrook is a MALE facility with a small area for females, anything the ladies want/need does not happen until after the men have everything they need or want. Only 2% of occupants at this facility are female, and they have over 400 men located at this facility.

12. Doctors are only available first thing in the morning unless absolute emergency and they get called in. The staff on duty did not want to talk to me as they were busy trying to update the boards and dealin with other issues. The lawyer would not be available until Monday which was 4 days time away. Staff stated that as I was a new arrival I was lucky to be able to get to see someone that quick and I should be happy. Well if I was staying that long I would have been happy. No one kept me updated on anything that was happening with my case. I got told 15 minutes before pick up that I was being moved.

13. At 3am, Home Office called the unit (Sahara Unit was where I was in Colnbrook) and told them to get me ready for transport back to Gatwick. The guard told them I was sick, but the person they spoke with didn't seem to care, and that I was going to be put on a plane. My flight was scheduled for 12pm, nine hours away. The guard contacted the duty nurse, who eventually came and declared to whoever they phoned that I was not fit to travel. The nurse was informed that I was to see the doctor first thing in the morning. I was finally allowed to get back to sleep around 4am and slept until 9am.

Lack of Medical Assistance:

14. The Removal Centre has set meals times, and you are required to show up for them regardless. I was unable to eat any breakfast as I was still feeling sick to my stomach. When I felt slightly better, I asked for some food and I was denied it.

15. When I woke up, I asked if I could have my medication (part of the reason I'm sick is because my medication time schedule is mucked up with the 5 hour time difference between UK and Canada). I'm told that I have to wait until I see the doctor.

16. I suffer from high blood pressure which I have to keep and maintain at a reasonable rate as I have damage to the left side of my heart. Any major changes in blood pressure could bring on heart attack or stroke. I felt that not being able to take my medication on time and being told that I could not take pain pills which I knew would not interfere in present medication could have had serious consequences. Luckily other then taking time to get blood pressure back to safe zone I was okay. I feel that I was mistreated in the aspect I was forced to wait over 5 hours longer then I should have to take my medications.

17. I saw the doctor at approximately 10 am he said that I had improved and was fit to travel, and I asked about my medication which were sitting on his desk. He said NO, I couldn't have them then, but that I'd have them back by noon and that as I seemed to know what to do with them, I could keep them with me from then. He stated he would notify UKBA I was fit to travel and that someone would advise when I would be flying out to go back to Canada.

18. Lunchtime is 1pm, and I had half a bowl of soup as I still wasn't feeling good. Medication time is 1:30pm, and I still hadn't received mine from the doctor. I asked again, and my medication finally arrived at 2.30pm.. I still didn't have my antacids or pain pills, but I was told I could get soluble paracetamol from the nurse. Due to having a massive headache I did not have a choice I accepted the Paracetamol. Something I had never taken before with my other medication and was slightly nervous about how it might react with my medication. Thankfully there were no ill effects.

Lack of Legal Advice and access to communication:

19. I wanted to try anything to ensure I had a chance to remain in the UK with my husband and other family members. On October 23rd I asked about speaking to the FREE lawyer they provide and was told sorry there are no available places to speak to them until Monday October 28th.

20. I got access to a computer, and spent the afternoon emailing my husband with the hope that he could visit. He arrived with just enough time for us to have a thirty-minute visit in a room with many other people visiting detainees as well. Everything you say and do is recorded, your fingerprint scanned on arrival in the room, and you're searched entering and leaving the room as a detainee. It is very intimidating to be in that room with all those other detainees. I was the only FEMALE detainee who was having visit at that time.

21. I again went to bed at 11.30pm, to be woken an hour later by a guard as I finally got to sleep. I'm being moved at 1am . I was allowed to call my husband (who'd slept in the car nearby overnight) and told him what was happening. I had to rely on him to arrange my transport from the airport in Toronto to home after I landed.

Removal:

22. When the transport arrived, they told me that my flight wasn't until 11.45am, and to make a complaint as there was no need to have me picked up nearly eleven hours early. I was told to make sure all my bags were there and given £2.00 in case I needed it to make phone calls while I waited for my flight. We arrived back at Gatwick at around 3am, I was searched again and my bags checked.

23. I was again put into a holding cell, which had the air-conditioning on full and the fluorescent lighting (which gives me headaches) on all night. I wasn't allowed to make any phone calls unless I had money (but the phone wasn't accepting coins, the £2.00 were of no use). At around 9am, I was told that I would be flying out at 11.45am, and I was given a chance to re-sort my bags. I again had to argue my case to be able to take my medications, but I got to take them in the end.

24. I was escorted to my flight around fifteen minutes before it left, and my passport and paperwork handed to a stewardess who was instructed not to give it to me until we landed in Toronto. I was given a seat at the very back of the plane, and had to walk past everyone else who had already boarded.. The stewardess was told that if we landed at any other airport, the security there were to be given my paperwork and were to escort me. The guards escorting me also watched until I was seated then left as the aircraft door closed behind them.

Arrival in Canada and Immigration Checks:

25. Almost eight hours later, I landed in Toronto and was given my paperwork by the stewardess. I arrived at passport control and was told that because I'd been refused entry to the UK, I had to go see the Canadian immigration staff . I explained that I didn't have a lot of time to spare as I had buses to catch, and was told that my immigration status was more important than my bus issue.

26. At Canadian Immigration, I spoke with a nice male Immigration Officer who asked why I'd been refused entry. I told him why, and he was shocked. He said that as a Canadian Citizen, I am entitled to enter the UK for up to six months without needing a visa. He released my file and told me I was free to go, but the delay had caused me to miss my bus. .

Reflections and Long term impact of detention:

27. I was made to feel a criminal, that I'd done something wrong, even though the Immigration Officer told me I hadn't. If I'd done nothing wrong, why was I refused entry to be with my husband? Now I get very nervous while going through passport control at ANY airport. Although I have successfully been to Philippines, Turkey and Malta with NO issues what so ever. After detention, I still have problems sleeping and often have issues with feeling cold even when it is fairly warm. No one should experience such a treatment.