

Serial fraudster convicted over Grenfell payout

Man claimed he had lost his wife and son in fire

'Despicable' deceit netted £12,500 of cash for victims

Jamie Grierson

A serial fraudster has admitted pretending that his wife and son were killed in the Grenfell Tower blaze, in west London, in a "despicable" attempt to pocket £12,500 set aside for victims of the disaster.

Anh Nhu Nguyen, 52, was pictured beside Prince Charles and gave television interviews posing as a survivor of the disaster, in which at least 80 people died. However, he did not live there but at an address in south-east London at the time.

He claimed his wife and son had died and he posed as a victim for nearly two weeks as he picked up £12,500 from charities and Kensington and Chelsea council.

He pleaded guilty at Southwark crown court yesterday to two charges of fraud by false representation and one charge of making an untrue statement for the purpose of obtaining a passport.

Nguyen, a British citizen born in Vietnam, was given a hotel room, clothing, food, electrical items and money. He was found out when he gave several different flat numbers, some of which did not exist and one where a real victim lived.

Kate Mulholland, from the Crown Prosecution Service, said: "Nguyen's deceit in the aftermath of such a catastrophic loss of life was breathtaking. He was willing to lie again and again, adapting his story when it was questioned, in order to profit from the huge aid efforts and outpouring of sympathy for true victims."

"At one point he claimed to have lived in a flat where the sole occupant had died. He also gave TV interviews in which he described the harrowing experience of escaping from the flat he had lived in for 20 years and losing his wife and son."

"CCTV showed that the day after the fire he was at a housing charity nine miles away in Whitechapel appearing happy and light-hearted, and his mobile phone was located at his home in Beckenham. The selfishness and manipulation Nguyen showed has horrified those whose job it is to help the true victims of Grenfell Tower."

Judge Philip Bartle said at a previous hearing that there was a "contemptible element" to the fraud. He added: "The background to this case is one which has received national, if not international, news coverage. Because on 14 June a fire broke out in Grenfell Tower and a very large number of people died."

"It has received enormous coverage, there is an inquiry and the ramifications, for those people genuinely affected by this awful tragedy, are very considerable indeed."

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The number of previous convictions, including arson and GBH, that Anh Nhu Nguyen had over a 30-year period

"This defendant has engaged in what the court can only describe as a despicable offence. As a result of which he received goods or money to the value of £12,500. Money which would otherwise have gone to the people who were genuinely affected by this appalling tragedy."

Nguyen, who has been in Britain since the 1980s, had 17 aliases, the court heard. He had 28 previous convictions for 56 offences spanning more than 30 years, including theft, arson and grievous bodily harm.

The family of the victim who lived at one of the tower block addresses given by Nguyen was caused "significant distress" after being questioned by police investigating the fraud, the court heard.

Nguyen will be sentenced on 15 December.

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Anh Nhu Nguyen, centre, with Prince Charles. He gave media interviews posing as a victim who had escaped from the Grenfell blaze Photograph: Philip Toscano/PA