

Thursday, 28th February 2008

- **Published Date:** 20 February 2002
- **Source:** The Scotsman
- **Location:** Scotland

Council tenant sues for £7m divorce payoff

By Frank O'Donnell

THE estranged wife of one of Scotland's wealthiest technology entrepreneurs, who claims she buys her clothes in charity shops, is demanding a £7 million divorce settlement.

Christine Deas, who has been living in a council house since she separated from her husband, Alex, last year, is demanding the huge sum after the breakdown of their 19-year marriage.

Dr Deas, 41, whose fortune stood at £400 million at the height of the technology boom, is said to own at least five yachts and was once listed as one of Scotland's richest men.

His total financial worth is unknown as he has transferred much of his assets to a trust for tax purposes.

Despite his tremendous wealth, the couple lived in a £50,000 home set in a quiet cul-de-sac in Dalkeith, Midlothian.

Since their separation on 11 May last year, Dr Deas has moved to the salubrious King's Gate House at Dalkeith Palace, a property fronted by imposing wrought iron gates.

He is understood to have spent around £150,000 refurbishing it.

Mrs Deas has moved to the council estate of Mayfield after she was allocated a property by Midlothian Council.

Yesterday, at the Court of Session in Edinburgh, Mrs Deas began proceedings for divorce, demanding a £7 million settlement together with a monthly payment of £3,000 and claiming her husband's behaviour had resulted in the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage.

Mrs Deas suffers from schizophrenia, a condition controlled by medication, and is unable to work. Her total income amounts to £64.99 per week.

She is expected to argue that she will suffer grave financial hardship on divorce and wants a share of her husband's substantial assets.

In recent years, Dr Deas had travelled widely overseas on business, particularly to Russia, while his wife remained at home.

Dr Deas's lawyer was not available for comment last night. Indigo, an Edinburgh-based public relations firm hired to act for him, also said it could not comment.

Spokeswoman Elizabeth Lambley said: "Alex has not lodged any defence at this stage. He has not instructed his lawyers to put forward his defence. While the case is still going on, we don't want to say anything."

Dr Deas, who has a passion for scuba-diving and mountaineering, moved to Scotland after growing up in the south of England. He left school at 15, joined Britain's top engineering research laboratory and took A-levels at night school.

In 1991, System Silicon, a company he set up in Scotland, won an award for creating the net-fault monitor used at Wimbledon tennis tournaments.

He then teamed up with a marketing high-flier, Cameron McColl, and launched Memory Corporation, a Dalkeith-based company which developed a revolutionary way of fixing computer chips.

The company was an instant success and floated on the Stock Market, turning its co-founders into instant paper millionaires. Dr Deas was worth an estimated £90 million and stormed into the Sunday Times Rich List ahead of stars such as Rolling Stone Bill Wyman and Formula One driver Nigel Mansell.

However, the market caved in and over a nine-month period, commodity chip prices tumbled, crashing Memory's share price to 22p by September 1996.

Dr Deas's shareholding fell from £90 million to £4.2 million and he stepped down from the head of the company.

However, in 1998, he pocketed around £2.6 million when he sold ten million shares in the company to Equitable Life Assurance Company.

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