

Witness Name: Mark Wilson

Statement No: WITN3976001

Exhibits: 0

Dated: January 2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MARK WILSON

I, Mark Wilson, will say as follows:-

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Mark Wilson. I was born on the [GRO-C] 1972 and I live at [GRO-C] [GRO-C] West Midlands [GRO-C] with my wife. I am an elected local Borough Councillor. I am a History Research Student at the University of Roehampton and a Learning Support Assistant.
2. My friend, Michael Anthony Price (Mike) born in [GRO-C] 1969, was infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) from contaminated blood products. He died having developed AIDS Related Complex (ARC) on [GRO-C] 1995, aged 25.
3. This witness statement has been prepared without the benefit of access to Mike's full medical records.

Section 2. How Affected

4. Mike had Haemophilia and was treated with blood products. I do not know the specific blood products Mike received (but I believe it was Factor VIII

concentrate) and I do not know the name of the Haemophilia Centre where he was treated. Mike and his mother told me that the blood products Mike was given had been contaminated with HIV and that he had had HIV for approximately 10 years before he died. He must therefore have become infected in or around 1985.

Section 3. Other Infections

5. I do not know if Mike was infected with anything other than HIV. I am not sure what the exact health conditions were but there were multiple issues for Mike at the time of his death and within the last two or three years of his life. I seem to recall his mother and Mike talking about liver cancer.

Section 4. Consent

6. I do not know if Mike was treated or tested without his knowledge and consent.

Section 5. Impact of the Infection

7. I knew Mike for almost 8 years. I can trace the date I first met him to 31st August 1987. I am sure he had been diagnosed, by this point in time, but I was unaware. Before he died, he and his mum told me he'd been living with HIV for 10 years, from infected blood. This comment suggests he would have initially contracted HIV in 1985. I wasn't party to this information in 1985, although I have no reason to doubt their information or comments.
8. I'll start by saying that the stigma of HIV and AIDS-related illnesses played a huge role in the way Mike and his family dealt with the tragedy surrounding him. In the 80s and 90s, the media's coverage of HIV and AIDS dubbed it 'the gay plague' etc. Whoever the victims were, the press at the time considered it was their fault, that they 'brought it on themselves', or it was a disease for 'druggies'. More markedly, the tabloid press also seemed to imply the victims were putting everyone else at risk. The lack of human kindness in many press

reports was indescribable at times. There was little or no dignity afforded to victims of AIDS. For our generation, these were our formative years, and we soon realised that HIV/AIDS was bad and had to be avoided. The myths and misinformation regarding the way the illness/disease was contracted led to a series of moral panics and the stigmatisation of the victims of AIDS. This stigma attached itself to victims (and their families) no matter how the disease was contracted and how it impacted on families and friends. I believe that Mike's family proves no exception. Other factors also influenced how families dealt with their collective traumas. The stress of keeping things secretive must have been huge. I'm sure Mike's family went through this process. Here I shall explain why I believe this to be the case.

9. Mike was a kind, inoffensive and intelligent young man with a great sense of humour. He was a good friend. It is criminal to think that he had his life taken away in such circumstances. He would have been a great father or husband given the chance. When I met him, we hit it off quickly, as we were alike in many respects. It was not just because we were both West Bromwich Albion supporters (this was how we met, in 1987 at an away game at Leeds), and were into our football more generally. We also had a similar sense of humour; we enjoyed similar TV programmes, were into similar music and films (particularly Auf Wiedersehen Pet, Fawlty Towers, Monty Python, The Prisoner and others). I used to go across to his home in Wolverhampton and he used to visit me (it took a train and a bus as his home was around 3 miles away from the Centre of Wolverhampton – so a lift in the parents' car was easier). I got to know a few of his friends who he'd been at school with, or who lived nearby. There was also a slightly larger circle of us who were friends, connected to the football at West Brom. We went to home and away matches; I got to know Mike more when we got the away travel coaches together. As we got a little older, we went to pubs, particularly on match day, but he did not usually drink alcohol, if at all (he said he didn't like the taste – but I now wonder if this was related to medication).

10. On reflection, I can think of a few events, (all seemed minor to me at the time) which I now consider to be related to his contraction of HIV. I have mentioned

the rare excursions into alcohol. Sometime in 1990, I believe Mike stopped working full time (I am not totally sure, but a few pointers revealed he may have been working part-time). He'd previously told me he had been working in an admin role in Wolverhampton. I always thought it was surprising as I always thought he was intelligent enough to have gone to University or obtain an equivalent level of qualification. I think a little later, perhaps around 1991, Mike stopped work, and signed on. He used to say he "was looking" for a job and I wondered why he wasn't in work (although anyone may be laid off work for a number of reasons).

11. I do remember around 1990-ish, he also started wearing what I would term more fashionable clothes – some expensive ones especially trainers - than he had done previously. I recall this was the time he had a girlfriend for a short time. He also started wearing contact lenses at this time (he had exclusively worn glasses until around this point) and seemed to be a little more aware of his appearance and image, than before, although he didn't change, in himself much. He was still Mike, as before.

12. Sometime in the latter part of 1990 or early 1991, Mike bought a new car – a Mini Metro. I distinctly remember him asking me if it was "ok" for him to have a brand-new car (I am sure he said at the time it cost £5,000). He was worried that some people he knew (especially a circle of his friends and acquaintances living near him in his area) may be jealous or think it was wrong for him to have it. I remember saying I didn't care if he had one, good luck to him if he had money to do it; he was my friend after all. I may have wondered how he could have afforded it at the time, but I just thought that it may have been inheritance and it was not really my business or concern.

13. As it happens, Mike 'wrote off' his car in an RTA in late November 1991. He spun the car over in icy and wet conditions between GRO-C
GRO-C. He had visited me that evening, and we went out for a few drinks – Mike rarely drank, so he was on his usual coca cola all evening. He was unscathed in the accident. I am sure this happened on a Tuesday evening, the 26th November. His mum had

telephoned our house around 11.30pm to ask where he was, as he hadn't got home. I remember he dropped me off at home around 10.30pm; she was beside herself with worry – at 12pm she rang back to tell us he'd had an accident. On the following Saturday, we met to go to the football, and he was fairly, non-plussed and somewhat amused about the accident. He'd been a little shocked and he told me the roof had disintegrated above his head as it skidded along upside down along the road (he was strapped into his seat). He also joked his loose change (he kept it for parking fees, in the car) had bounced off his head.

14. A few months later in the summer of 1992, Mike went to Australia on holiday for a few weeks. I think he may have had a relation – I think a cousin - who lived there. He rang a couple of times whilst he was there and showed me the photos of the sights when he got back. It was close to Sydney, as I am certain he had photos of the Harbour Bridge and Opera House, plus spiders in his cousin's garden. I also recall it was around this time when he met Tracy, his girlfriend. He moved into a flat with Tracy and I think they were planning to marry at one point as he'd considered me and another friend to be best man.

15. Around the later part of 1992/early 1993, Mike's health started to worsen, slightly. It saw him spend some time away from a few football matches (this was rare as he'd missed hardly any games since I'd known him including a few seasons of not missing any matches, home or away). He started spending more time in hospital too. My memory of these times is somewhat sketchy, but he rarely gave a specific reason why he was in hospital and we never really asked him thoroughly enough. I do recall him saying he was anaemic on a couple of occasions, but I cannot chronologically place these comments – but it was probably around 1991/2, so prior to this. I am sure that he may have mentioned his liver at one point, but I never pressed him on the subject, nor did anyone else. I also recall him sometimes taking tablets, but I do not recall what they were for, I think he spent two lengthy spells in hospital, around the middle of 1993. He was in the Queen Elizabeth hospital, Birmingham, initially. He may have also spent time in Russell's Hall, Dudley.

16. There was a strange incident involving Mike, Tracy and some of his Wolverhampton friends, at the end of 1992/ start of 1993. It was at the end of the Christmas holidays, and he stayed over at my parents' house, instead of going home. Their house was small; the spare room was given over to my father's model rail hobby, so Mike slept on a mattress in my room. We went out locally and one evening, when we were getting ready to sleep, he asked if he could stay a couple of days longer. We spoke through the night and it seemed that Tracy had left him – she or some of his circle of Wolverhampton friends were not speaking to him. He told me Tracy had avoided him, when he was to meet her on Christmas Day at their local pub. It was very muddled. I believe these incidents happened over the Christmas Day and Boxing Day of 1992. I asked him why they would act in such ways, but he claimed not to know at all, half suggesting she'd gone with someone else. He was reconciled with Tracy, a few weeks later. In retrospect, I do think about this time and wonder if it had anything to do with something being made more public about him. I am sure some of his friends, never spoke to him again, although I may be wrong.

17. The time I started to get more concerned was in May 1993. West Bromwich Albion managed to get to Wembley to contest the Play-Off final v Port Vale. Most of us travelled in a minibus. Mike was taken to the match by his parents, by car. I think he really struggled that day. After this he seemed to pick up and get better. There were a few 'peaks and troughs', but overall he was able to return to being fairly stable – at least it seemed so. We never spoke of health and well-being much – apart from when he came out of hospital -we were all young lads and I doubt Mike would have wished to speak much about it. As time wore on, I do recall Mike becoming slightly distant at times – although not to the point of not interacting or being out with us at football or the like. I put this down to him being besotted with his girlfriend, Tracy.

18. Mike next travelled abroad in November 1993 – he and Tracy went to Venice and Florence. West Brom were playing Fiorentina of Florence in the Anglo-Italian Cup, so they had a short break around the game. In January 1994 Mike and Tracy had another large holiday – this time 2 weeks in Jamaica. At this

time, a few of us started to question (amongst ourselves) how Mike could afford these winter holiday trips without seemingly having much work. These were not short-haul bargain flights (these had not really developed at that point) but were expensive holidays. One friend of mine, who was struggling to bring up two children was quite forthright in his opinions on the matter. It was realism tinged with envy.

19. However, later in 1994, Mike was back in hospital - I think at Queen Elizabeth, again, but I think he also began having treatment from Heartlands Hospital, Birmingham. At this time, around October or November 1994, there were more issues with Tracy and they split again. At the time it seemed she was behaving unfairly toward Mike; but only we could imagine what was happening, or what they went through. Shortly after this, Mike moved back home to his parents' house and I think Tracy avoided Mike and his family after this.

20. The later spells in hospital were lengthier, from memory and in March 1995, he went back in Heartlands for a few days, maybe a fortnight or more. I remember he watched his last West Bromwich Albion match in March 1995. Quite often, I'd ring him to see how he was. I was getting busy, as I was studying for my 'A' Levels and the exams were a few months away, so I rarely got to Wolverhampton to see him, although I often rang his home to chat to him. At this point, he was very ill and we were all more concerned. Something didn't seem right, with his health, which was more apparent from later 1994 onwards. Most people who knew him commented, as his health was debilitating and he was losing more weight and not eating (Mike wasn't a heavy-set young man anyway, he was slim, probably about 9 stone in 'healthy' weight, but he was visibly losing weight by this time).

21. It was around Easter 1995 when a mutual friend, Russell Foster, telephoned me. He told me that Mike had 6 weeks to live and that he had AIDS. At the time I was studying for my A-Levels, which I took late. I left school at 16 but went back at 21 to do further education. Mike's mum had spoken to him earlier, as he'd had another short stint in hospital, but was by now home

again. He didn't want to spend time or die in hospital, so was taken home. I immediately rang Mike's mum and spoke to Mike. It was early evening. The following day I borrowed my father's car and drove across to Mike's house. We watched 2 series of Auf Wiedersehen Pet back-to-back. As much as I could, I spent as much time as was possible in those final weeks with him; we really made those last weeks count, laughing about the things which made us laugh. In early May 1995, he went back to Heartlands for the last time. I visited him in hospital at least 6 times – around twice a week on average. I saw him last on Sunday May 21st 1995, at Heartlands Hospital. Mike was around 5-6 stone in weight and looked like a doll, curled up on his bed. We still managed to laugh about Wolverhampton Wanderers losing against Bolton in the play-off semi-final. In these last few visits, he could not talk much and was weak and exhausted. I knew then that I might not see him again. Its difficult to explain the impact of it all. He passed away in the early hours of Friday 26th May 1995, just beyond midnight from memory. His mum called our home at 7am to pass on the sad news. I was stunned, even though I was prepared for it.

22. To conclude, my evidence is at times barren, but for some good reason. Mike, his family and later, Tracy, were keeping his illness very secret. Young men in their twenties rarely question poor health, unless it is their immediate concern and with Mike avoiding any talk of his health issues, it was unlikely to be a topic of which we spent much time, even though our interests and awareness was quite wide. Our talk was of football, music, going out socialising, girls, TV comedy and (sometimes – but rarely) current affairs. Some of the events and issues in Mike's life, from the outside looking in, didn't 'add up'. Occasionally, when things arose, you felt there was more to the issue/problem/situation than met the eye. I felt this at the time, but never really questioned Mike on these things – apart from the Christmas 1992/New Year 1993 incidents outlined above. Only in 1994, did I and others begin to really question what was happening to him, between us as friends (not to him from memory – I instinctively thought there was a deeper issue and didn't want to pry into his and his family's business). I imagine it was harder for his family to keep things quiet, because as his health declined, it was much harder to keep that

secretive as things got physically, progressively worse. Mike was also concerned how we'd all react to hearing he had AIDS. The impact of the stigma, I think, caused him to think we wouldn't stay with him as friends. I let him know that he was a friend, no matter how he contracted HIV; I was there for him. But the secrecy may have been more than this – I'm still not sure if there was some kind of 'secrecy embargo' related to pay outs etc. I imagine all this combined placed untold stress and pain on Mike and his family. I think the psychological burden on them was huge. I'm not sure how his father coped. I do recall his mum started going to a Spiritual Church in Wolverhampton; I'm not sure when she started, but I wasn't aware of her going until late on in this chronology, so it may have been a coping mechanism. It was here that his Memorial Service was held, complete with a medium, in July 1995. Unfortunately, I lost touch with his mum around 12-18 months later. I moved to London to study for my degree in September 1995, and I only spoke to her on the telephone, maybe twice, after that. My own mother kept in touch for a couple of years or so, also via telephone and sending Christmas Cards etc. But it seemed harder to keep in touch pre-social media and mobile phone. Therefore, I have no knowledge of his parents' wellbeing after 1996. I cannot imagine how difficult it was for them.

23. I moved down to London the September, after Mike died, to do my degree and ended up living there for 9 years. When I moved back, I had already lost contact but I remember his family had moved to new house just a couple of streets over. I always wondered why they did that, as the house they moved into was no bigger. Maybe it was to move on.

24. As for his friends, I suppose we dealt with it in the only way we knew – to approach things with stoicism and humour/wry smiles, in regard to his memory (His memorial service was held in the aforementioned church in Waterloo Road, Wolverhampton, opposite Wolverhampton Wanderers' ground, Molineux; Albion's arch rivals for the uninitiated – many a smirk was raised). The first any of us knew what the cause of illness was, was approximately 6/7 weeks before he died, which created a sense of loss beyond anything I had experienced at that point in my life. We supported each

other; for example, 5 of us went to the funeral and took a floral tribute – in the shape of a West Bromwich Albion shirt. But there was a lot of shock and upset, which surfaced for me in later years, especially when reading about the other victims, which brought things home to me. There was no counselling available for friends – I guess we bottled it all in to keep going as much as we all could. To this day, I've never spoken much about the effects on us to the others who were close to Mike. But this isn't about us, as much as it is about Mike and his family. Words can't quite portray or describe how I feel for them, to this day. The psychological toll on them must have been unimaginable.

25. This concludes my testimony. Much of my thought is in reflection and memory from, recollection. Any errors are mine.

Section 6. Treatment/care/support

26. I do not know if Mike faced difficulties or obstacles in obtaining treatment and psychological support. I had no counselling (as outlined at paragraph 24 above).

Section 7. Financial Assistance

27. I do not know the level of financial assistance Mike received from the Trusts and Funds set up. I believe Mike likely to have received a payment in 1991, as he was able to buy a new car at the time. It ties in with the timing and his sudden influx of money.

Section 8. Other Issues

28. There are no other issues.

Anonymity

29. I do not wish to remain anonymous. I would like to give oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

GRO-C

Signed.....

Dated 18.01.2020.....