

Witness Name: James Robert Cunningham

Statement No.: WITN7393001

Exhibits: Nil

Dated:

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF JAMES ROBERT CUNNINGTON

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 20 October 2022.

I, James Robert Cunningham, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is James Robert Cunningham. My date of birth is GRO-C 1980, and my address is known to the Inquiry.
2. I am married with two children GRO-C is 16, and GRO-C is 11 years old. I run a virtual assistant business on behalf of a beneficial owner.
3. I intend to speak about my father, Robert Dennis Cunningham, born on GRO-C 1958. My dad was diagnosed with severe Haemophilia A in his childhood and contracted HIV due to receiving contaminated blood and blood products.

4. I intend to speak in particular about the impact of the loss of my dad due to contaminated blood and HIV/AIDS.
5. I will also speak about my mother Jill Cunnington who was infected through my father with HIV and her struggles and the impact the infection had on her.
6. I confirm that I am not legally represented and am happy for the Inquiry Team to assist with my statement. I am aware of the provisions regarding anonymity and do not wish to provide my account anonymously.
7. The Inquiry Investigator has also explained the Inquiry's statement of approach and 'Right to Reply' procedure. I understand that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.

Section 2. How Affected

8. For full details of how my dad came to be infected, the treatment he received, and its impact on our family, my mum has provided a statement to the Inquiry, see **WITN0154001**.
9. I am the oldest of three sons, and my brothers are twins. They have also provided a statement to the Inquiry at **WITN7384001**.
10. My dad passed away when I was nine years old. It was very traumatic because I was a child, so I blocked most of my memories of the times before he passed away and the immediate aftermath. Growing up, my mum did not talk much about it, and I learned more details about what happened after reading my mum's statement to this Inquiry.

Section 3. Other Infections

11. As far as I am aware, my dad was only infected with HIV due to being given contaminated blood products.

Section 4. Consent

12. My mum would be the best person to provide information about issues regarding consent.

Section 5. Impact

13. My earliest memories of my dad involve me sitting on his bed with a big television in the corner, watching Inter Milan vs Sampdoria on Channel 4. I remember who won the football match, my dad's blue Cortina car, which had been adapted for his use, and his Graham red wheelchair and crutches, but I cannot remember his face which really hurts.
14. I do not remember his face, but from looking at old photos, it is clear that my brothers Brian and Thomas are the spitting image of my dad. He had a bit of red in his hair, which I have in my beard sometimes.
15. I always knew my dad was a haemophiliac and assumed all his health issues were related to his haemophilia. Growing up, I used to tell people that my dad was a haemophiliac.
16. Back then, everything was a struggle for him. We could never do things like going to the park or having family days out, but I put those down to his disability.
17. By the time my dad died, he was very thin and had blotchy skin.

18. On 29 November 1989, which was St Andrews Day, my mum told my siblings and I to go upstairs. Our local GP, Dr Taylor, was around, and we rarely saw him, so it was strange.
19. In the house, my room was at the top of the stairs, and you could see the living room from my room. At first, I sat at the top of the stairs trying to see what was happening, but my mum said we should go to our rooms.
20. I was fairly stealthy in those days, and until my late teens, my mum joked about how I knew where the floorboards creaked and could avoid these. I saw my dad lying down on the settee, and Dr Taylor looked at my mum and shook his head. That was it, my dad had died.
21. I don't remember much after that. I cannot recall how I felt in the immediate aftermath. My dad's body was taken to the local cooperative funeral parlour on [GRO-C] Road, and I remember my grandparents at first encouraging and then practically dragging me in to say goodbye to my dad's body. I was upset because I did not want to see him. I don't remember the funeral or actually seeing him at the funeral parlour.
22. The family cremated my dad, but I don't know if the decision to do so was because of the HIV diagnosis or if that would have been his preference.
23. I do not talk about my dad with my mum or brothers or visit my dad's grave. He is buried in the [GRO-C] Cemetery in [GRO-C]. I live just outside of Wolverhampton, but my mum still lives in that direction, and I see her regularly. I never feel the need to go and see him or lay flowers like ordinary people would.
24. The last time I visited my dad's grave was on my wedding day on [GRO-C] [GRO-C] 2012. My wife and I were getting married about five or six miles up the road, and I went for a drive before the wedding and just

found myself there. I don't know why. It was the first time I had visited in a long time. Maybe I wanted him to share in the occasion.

25. My mum kept a lot to herself, and from my perspective, this was a lasting impact on her. I assumed she must have had her breakdowns privately because she had three young boys to look after.

26.

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27. My mum initially told us that our dad had died of pneumonia, and I went on believing that for many years. As I have grown older, she has shared more, and I have come to learn more about the circumstances that affected my dad and, consequently, my mum. For a long time we were unaware that my mum had been infected with HIV through my dad.

28. One day my mum came back from the hospital and was visibly upset. She explained that one of the drugs for HIV that she had been taking had stopped working. I think she was worried that she was dying like my dad. That was when she explained that she had contracted HIV from my dad.

29. I cannot recall how old I was then, but it was scary, and I was very worried about what would happen to my brothers and I. My grandparents began referring to me as the man of the house and said I had to be strong for everyone. It was a lot of pressure for a child and it affected me. Back then, I thought I could not show my emotions because it would be seen as a weakness, so I repressed a lot of my feelings.

30. It's had a huge emotional impact on me to date. My kids sometimes look at our old family photos and ask questions, but I put them off by saying it is a story for another day. My wife and I recently told our daughter

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about some of the circumstances surrounding her grandfather's death but I still find it hard to recount what happened as I learned to bury my emotions.

31. This was due in part to this Inquiry becoming more public. My mum called me on the phone when she got the interim payment. She was distraught, and I was trying to calm her down when [GRO-C] came into the room and asked what was happening.
32. My mum has not had a chance to grieve, even after all this time it is still very raw for her and it is easy to set her off emotionally. I am hopeful that we may all get a chance to grieve properly when this Inquiry comes to a close in the Spring. Hopefully it will provide closure for us as a family.
33. When we were growing up, I did not notice the campaign about AIDS in the media. I was rarely at home watching television and probably spent more time out of the house playing with friends.
34. I would say that I gradually became more aware of the stigma against AIDS, which I believe still persists to some degree. I asked my mum a few years later about how one of the friends she used to see was doing, only for my mum to say they were no longer friends because the lady had distanced herself from my mum after she found out about her diagnosis.
35. There was one occasion we had to have new windows put in because one night, someone threw bricks through the window of our house. I am unsure if they were kids who did it to be funny or it was a warning of sorts but I never attached much significance to the event. If it was anything to do with AIDS, my mum has toughed it out, and now she has a much nicer house.
36. Things are better now than when we were growing up because my mum has come out of her shell and made more friends. Back in the 1990s, I

don't remember mum going out to the pub or dropping us off with our grandparents so she could meet up with friends. She was almost a recluse.

37. I do not know if this was due to our financial circumstances, but most of the time, my mum was either working or at home. Nowadays, my mum has a couple of good friends with whom she can go to the cinema.
38. It did not have an impact on my education because people at school did not know the reason why my dad passed away. If I was asked, I would probably have said he died of pneumonia. I was an average student and did not enjoy school.
39. My mum attended all of our sporting events, so I did not feel like I had missed out on anything. For most of my life, it has been the four of us: my mum, my brothers and I.
40. I have never disclosed that my dad died of AIDS to friends because of the potential stigma. I told my wife fairly early in our relationship because we were very close from the start. We went to the cinema and went for a drink at the pub afterwards and I told her and she was fine with it. Even then, she did not push me for further details.
41. My employer is a retired nurse, so she knows a lot of history, and there's a lot of trust between us, so I have told her. She's been very supportive, and she trusts me. I do not go around telling any and everyone. My mother-in-law only knows because my mum told her about her diagnosis.
42. The lasting impact is that I struggle to open up and talk about my feelings. I also have a general distrust of medical professionals, especially as I learn more about what happened. I recently had a cold which lasted for over two weeks, and both my wife and my mum banded together to insist I go to the doctors, but I refused to do so.

43. In the last couple of years, I have become more accepting of talking about it to others. Previously, I always felt like it was my business, and I would rather keep it to myself.
44. Growing up, I had a strong relationship with my grandparents, and my children currently have a strong relationship with their grandparents. It upsets me that my dad never got to meet them. I feel particularly sad because my son has a strong bond with his other grandfather, and in his eyes, grandpa is a god. GRO-C has lost a potential relationship with my dad. My daughter has a strong relationship with my mum too.
45. I still worry that my mum is going to die. In the back of my mind, I worry that something will change, maybe the medication will become expensive, or they will stop giving her the drugs. Every time she phones me after a doctor's appointment to confirm that she has been given the all clear, I feel relieved.
46. Even though my mum's viral load is undetectable, I still worry about the strength of her immune system. I know that HIV is a virus that affects the immune system. Whenever I am suffering from a virus or illness like a cold or flu, I refuse to go and visit my mum because I would not want to pass this on to her whereas, if it were a visit to my in-laws, I would still go to see them. I feel very protective about my mother's health.
47. I do not know if I have ever been tested for HIV. I used to worry about the chance that either my mum or dad could have passed it on to us, but it has been many years, and I know I am fine.
48. I have never donated blood, although, on one occasion, I saw a flyer for a local blood drive and walked in there to try and donate blood. They took my details and told me they would contact me, but they never did. It was probably an administrative error, as sometimes things fall through the cracks. However, because of my history, I became a bit paranoid that

perhaps they had found some information about me or something was wrong with my blood.

49. My mum being infected with HIV has never affected our relationship or my children's relationship with her. It is the opposite because it makes me want to be as close to her as possible. I worry that one day things will not be all well, so I want to make the most of our time with her.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

50. I do not know if counselling or psychological support was ever made available to either of my parents at the time of their diagnosis. I suspect it was probably not available at the time.
51. I have never sought counselling, although my mum and wife think it would be beneficial for me to do so. I prefer to deal with it myself.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

52. I do not have any knowledge or details of any financial support my mum may have received as a result of her and my dad being infected with HIV from contaminated blood other than she does receive support and has, as mentioned been given the interim payment recommended by the Inquiry.

Section 8. Other Issues

53. I have become more accepting now and have realised that it was neither my mum's nor my dad's fault that my dad died. It has affected my faith in medical professionals because I wonder how they could have allowed such a thing to happen.

54. For me, justice is not about money but for someone to recognise and acknowledge that this happened and to say they are sorry and it should never have happened and won't happen again.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated

4 JANUARY 2023