

STATEMENT OF WITNESS

STATEMENT OF ELEANOR ATKINSON

DATED THIS SECOND DAY OF JANUARY 2009

I, Eleanor Atkinson, declare that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that if it is tendered in evidence at the Inquiry I will be liable for prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false or do not believe to be true.

1. The Inquiry has disclosed a number of documents to me. Where I make specific reference to a document in my statement I have given it the relevant reference.
2. I was arrested shortly after arriving at my place of work on 10 April 2001 for allegedly being involved in a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice in connection with the Robert Hamill murder investigation. I was arrested in full view of some of my work colleagues which was very distressing.
3. I am the wife of Robert Atkinson and we have been married for 31 years. We have two children. I have been working for the Northern Ireland Electricity Service for some 34 years.
4. On 9 October 1997, I voluntarily went to Lurgan Police Station where I made a Witness Statement which is contained in document 9195 to 9197. I was aware, at that time, that my husband had been interviewed by Police about his actions during the incident of public disorder in Portadown town centre in the early morning of 27 April 1997 and was also questioned about telephone calls made from our home to the Hanvey home on the morning of that date and on 2 May 1997. I volunteered to provide a statement outlining who had made the calls.
5. I recall that my husband was detailed for a late turn of duty on 26 April 1997 and I was aware that I would not expect him home until at least after mid-night, though it was not unusual for his shift to be further extended until mid-morning.

6. To the best of my recollection, I went to bed around about mid-night. Michael McKee and his wife, Andrea, had called at the house earlier in the evening uninvited. Michael had a carryout of drink with him and as he had, during the course of the evening, consumed a considerable amount of alcohol then decided to stay rather than to travel back to their home in [REDACTED], especially as Michael had told me that he had to be at the Taw Kwon Do Club for 9.00 a.m. the following morning to give private instruction. I live very close to the club.
7. I don't recall my husband returning home at about 4.00 a.m. but I do recall the phone ringing during the night which my husband answered. He told me that it was the station ringing and that he had to report back for work and, when he returned again, it was around 8.00 a.m. I recall him telling me, at that time, that there had been a disturbance in the town involving people who had come off the "Coach bus". I recall that it was a very short conversation and he then went to sleep.
8. I then got up and I recollect wakening both Michael and Andrea as they had to be at the club for 9.00 a.m. I recollect making them tea and toast before they left.
9. When taking breakfast, I recall mentioning what my husband had told me about the row in the town centre involving people returning from the Coach Inn and Michael appeared to be concerned as he told me that his niece, Tracey Clarke, had gone to the Coach, probably with her boyfriend, Allister Hanvey, and that he was concerned about her welfare and he asked me if he could use the phone to check-up on her.
10. I do not recall being in earshot of the telephone conversation though I believe that he mentioned phoning the Hanvey house. Shortly afterwards, both Michael and Andrea left to go to the club.
11. Like my husband, I was acquainted with members of the Hanvey family. I knew Allister Hanvey from his time in the Tae Kwon Do club, both as an exponent of the art and as an instructor. My daughter, [REDACTED], had taken up the sport when she was about 4 and became very proficient in it. Over the years, she would have received some instruction from Allister Hanvey who I recall, had achieved black belt.

12. His father, Kenneth, was also known to me as a work colleague of many years and I also knew his wife. I also knew Tracey Clarke as I was aware that she was in a relationship with Alister Hanvey. Tracey was also a member of the Taw Kwon Do club and attended social events organised by the club as well as attending tournaments and I recall her going to a training camp in Lanzarote in 1998.
13. In relation to the telephone call made from my home to the Hanvey home on 2 May 1997, I confirm that I made the call enquiring about the availability of equipment and literature for my daughter, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] was about to take an important exam and it was essential that she had access to a pattern book which I believed may have been in the Hanvey house as the Hanvey children had been active in the club, though Allister, I think, at that time, had ceased his involvement.
14. It was not uncommon for Michael and Andrea to stay overnight in my home. While I cannot be precise as to how many occasions they had stayed, I do remember in 1996 when my husband was temporarily billeted at Mahon Road Army Camp for some 28 days, both Andrea and Michael were very supportive. They drove me up to the Camp almost on a daily basis so that I could spend some time with Robert and sometimes my children came with me. Also during that period, they stayed overnight. Accommodation was never a problem as [REDACTED], my son, frequently stayed with his grandmother which left a bedroom available.
15. Apart from overnight stays, the McKees were frequent visitors to the house and would often arrived unannounced, maybe two to three times a week. My husband and myself were very supportive of [REDACTED], driving her to and from the club on a daily basis. We also attended tournaments and training camps and organised social events. A Recreation Club was formed to raise finances for trips and my husband became the Secretary. He also, like other parents, gave practical assistance to Michael in maintaining the premises. Michael, to my recollection, was not good at financial management and he was also very unpredictable in his behaviour, regularly absenting himself for days from both the club and his own home. I believe that this was because of marital difficulties and his heavy drinking.

16. Following my arrest, I was taken to Gough Barracks and interviewed by Police with regard to allegations that I had been involved in a conspiracy with my husband, together with Mr and Mrs McKee, to conceal the content of telephone calls made from my home to the Harvey house on the two occasions as previously mentioned. It was alleged that I had participated in this conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. A copy of the transcript of these interviews is contained within documents 21295 to 21353. Throughout the course of the said interviews, I strenuously denied involvement in the alleged offence. I told my interviewers what I have previously stated and which I continue to say as true, namely that the call to the Harvey household from my home phone on the morning of 27 April 1997 was made by Michael McKee and that a subsequent call to the Harvey's phone on 2 May 1997 was made by myself. A transcript of this interview is contained within document commencing 21295.
17. Following interview, I was released on bail and re-attended Lurgan Police Station on 31 May 2001 when I was further interviewed regarding the same allegation which I consistently denied. A transcript of these interviews are contained within documents 21354 to 21411.
18. Like my husband, I was not aware that Andrea McKee changed the statement that she made of 29 October 1997 until I was arrested in April 2001. I was made aware that she had made another statement to Police in October 2000 which was in contradiction of her initial statement. The second statement is contained within documents 14887 to 14895. I am aware that she subsequently made further statements to Police.
19. I was also made aware that Michael McKee had retracted his initial statement to the Police denying that he had made the telephone call to the Harvey house and, like his wife, alleged that he was not at in my home at the relevant time. I do not know why Michael or Andrea retracted their statements. I recall that we continued to be friends up until about 1999/2000. I remember that my husband had a disagreement with Michael concerning proposed changes in the payment of club subscriptions which my husband opposed on the grounds that such changes would have been to the detriment to the club members. I know that this raised tension and I believe that as a reaction, Michael did not

favour our daughter, [REDACTED], participating in the world championships, unfairly taking the view that she was not up to the required standard.

20. Social contact with the McKees continued to reduce and then the last I knew was that Michael had left Portadown with the mother of one of his pupils and had gone to live in the Republic of Ireland. Andrea then closed the club and, as far as I knew, went to live in Wales.
21. I would reiterate that the content of the statement which I made to Police on 9 October 1997 is true. I was never involved in any conspiracy to suppress the truth surrounding the initial telephone call to the Harvey house and I further deny any suggestion or allegation that I contributed in any way to legal expenses which may have been incurred by either Andrea or Michael McKee in connection with statements they made to Police in 1997.

Signed Eleanor Atkinson

Eleanor Atkinson

Witnessed

