

Witness Statement of: Joanne Minton

No. of statement: 1

Exhibits: 2

Date of statement: 21/05/2018

GRENFELL TOWER PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOANNE MINTON

I, JOANNE MINTON, will say as follows:

1. I will make this statement about the events on the 14th June 2017 for the purposes of Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. I wish to make a statement as part of Phase 2.

Background

2. I was born on [REDACTED] and live at [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk, which is a three-bedroom flat located at the Grenfell Tower-end of this finger block (exhibited at JM/1). I am a joint leaseholder of [REDACTED] Hurstway Walk having bought the flat with my friend in November 1988. I currently live in the flat with the joint lease-holder. I have lived at the property since 1984 and I know the community and area very well.
3. I will shortly begin work as an administrator at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in Islington.

Community

4. Having lived in Hurstway Walk for 34 years, I feel very comfortable in the Lancaster West Estate Community. I split my time between my flat in Hurstway Walk and my partner's flat in Highbury Hill and so my involvement in the community has been limited but I know people around me well enough to say hello to them.

5. One aspect of the community that I love is that it is culturally mixed. I come from a mixed English-Trinidadian family and have always enjoyed being exposed to different cultures.
6. The Lancaster West Estate community is also lively and I like hearing and seeing life going on around me. I like hearing the children playing between the finger blocks and I used to like seeing them train in the busy boxing gym on the first floor of the Grenfell Tower. Outside of my balcony there are five allotment boxes in which local adults grow vegetables and I will sometimes chat to them as they tend to their boxes. Occasionally they share their vegetables with me.
7. Because my flat is located in the left-hand corner of Hurstway Walk, the view of the Grenfell Tower from the flat is very limited. I am only able to see the Tower if I lean out of my balcony and even if I do this I am only able to see the upper part of the Tower. However my flat is very close to the Tower – the entrance to my flat is approximately a 30 second walk from the entrance to the Tower.

14th June

8. In relation to the night, I first became aware of the fire when at some time after midnight I was awoken from my sleep by screams for help. I am a light sleeper. My first thought was that someone was being assaulted and so I got out of bed to call the police from my living room telephone. However, as I stood in the hallway, I heard hurried footsteps outside my front door and, looking through my letterbox, I saw people running along the communal corridor of Hurstway Walk towards the block entrance closest to the Grenfell Tower (**JM/1**). The block entrance door is located directly outside my door.
9. I put on some shoes and outdoor clothing and joined a growing group of people standing just outside of the block entrance. People were joining the group from the Hurstway Walk communal corridor and from the ramp, which lies between Hurstway Walk and Latimer Road Station where I have shown on exhibit **JM/1**. We were standing approximately 100 yards from the Grenfell Tower and had an unimpeded view of the fire.

10. Looking up at the fire, I was struck by how contained it was. The flames and smoke hugged the panels of the Tower, rising vertically in a manner that seemed unnatural to me. I remember seeing burnt bits of the building, particularly cladding, flying off the sides of the building and floating skywards. I didn't see where the debris landed, but later I saw debris scattered as far as Ladbroke Grove.
11. The smoke billowing from the sides of the Grenfell Tower made me cover my mouth with my clothing, but I do not recall inhaling the smoke.
12. I saw distressed figures appearing at the windows of the Tower screaming for help and this sight left me in shock. I was desensitised to what I was seeing. I kept wondering why the figures I saw were not rushing down the stairs. I also felt detached. It felt like I was watching a film. I couldn't comprehend that this was taking place on my doorstep.
13. I do not remember the movements or activities of the fire officers. This is largely because as I watched the fire, my focus was on the upper part of the Tower which was beyond the reach of the fire officers.
14. Over time the fire became increasingly out of control and the debris was growing in volume. I recall thinking as I observed the fire that it was spreading quickly but I am not able to quantify the speed. The viewing crowd also grew in size, as people were drawn to the area by the noise of the fire and the screams coming from the Tower and members of the viewing crowd. The police therefore instructed us to stay behind the block entrance door which I have marked on **JM/1**.
15. I became increasingly anxious watching events unfold in front of me. Members of the viewing crowd were speculating as to whether trapped residents of the Grenfell Tower were jumping from their windows to escape the fire and I kept covering my eyes to avoid seeing these scenes. Fortunately I did not see anyone jump. After watching the fire for a period of time that was considerably shorter

than one hour, I returned to my flat because I could no longer bear being in the crowd.

16. Before we were evacuated from Hurstway Walk, I repeatedly moved between my flat and the viewing area, caught between a belief that I needed to witness what was taking place and a desire not to be voyeuristic.

Evacuation

17. I was in my flat when the police banged on my door and told me and the other Hurstway Walk residents to evacuate our flats. I don't remember what time we were evacuated. Initially I had no idea where I was going to go, I just packed a bag, put on a warm jacket, and followed the crowds. I did not see any police officers during the evacuation of Hurstway Walk.
18. I exited Hurstway Walk at the exit closest to the Latimer Road Station and walked up Bramley Road to where it intersects with Silchester Road. I then turned right down Silchester Road and walked along Silchester Road until I reached the Methodist Church. A police officer was standing outside the Methodist Church directing evacuees to shelter and assistance and I asked him where I could go. He directed me to the Maxilla Hall Social Club, which is located under the Westway, which I have marked on exhibit **JM/2**. I then walked back down Silchester Road and turned right on Bramley Road and then right again under the Westway. The Maxilla club is located near the shops under the Westway.
19. During my walk from Hurstway Walk to the Maxilla Hall Social Club I saw a number of police officers milling around directing evacuees, although I am not able to recall how many. I only interacted with the police officer outside the Methodist Church on Silchester Road.
20. At the Maxilla Community Club I and the other evacuees were provided with refreshments. There were not many of us at the Maxilla Club; I think most people went to the Latimer Christian Centre and the Methodist Church. I stayed at the Club until approximately 6 am when I walked to my sister's flat, which is

located [REDACTED] a 20-minute walk from the Club. I had decided not to disturb my sister Karen and her family until I knew they were getting up.

21. It took some time for me to realise the scale and seriousness of the Grenfell Tower fire. The shock I was experiencing meant I had failed to acknowledge the reality of the situation as I witnessed the fire. It had not registered with me, for example, that the figures that I saw at the windows of the Tower could not escape.
22. The reality began to dawn on me in the Maxilla Hall Social Club, when I saw fellow evacuees enquiring after missing friends and relatives, and later when I heard the estimated number of deaths reported on the television. However even as the reality dawned on me, I continued to feel empty. I felt emotionally detached and I didn't want to acknowledge that the fire had happened. I also felt confused. I didn't know what to do or how I should feel.
23. I stayed with my partner in Highbury between the 14th June and the 18th June. I spent my first night in my flat on the 19th June but I returned to it to pick up some of my belongings on the 17th June. When I entered my flat on the 17th June, I found that my balcony and the glass in my windows were covered in a thin layer of dust. There were also some fragments of debris on my balcony. The fragments looked like coal but they were no bigger than a tennis ball and were very fragile.
24. By the 17th June, the communal areas of Hurstway Walk appeared to have been cleaned but the block entrance closest to the Grenfell Tower had been cordoned off with barriers to prevent anyone from using it. There were security guards stationed outside each of the other entrances to Hurstway Walk to prevent non-residents from entering the Walkway because the fobs were not working. There was also a heavy police presence around the Walkway.
25. When I arrived back at the Lancaster West Estate on the 17th June, I tried to avoid looking at the Tower. I continue to try to avoid looking at it. It is a big,

dark presence and seeing it makes me feel very sad. It was, and it remains, a painful reminder of the traumatic events of the 14th June.

Impact

26. Whilst I did not know any of those who died in the Grenfell Tower fire personally, I have noticed that there are fewer children at the Leisure Centre and playing in the play areas on the estate and I wonder how many of those I used to see died in the fire. It makes me sad thinking about this.
27. The trauma of witnessing the Grenfell Tower fire and losing members of my community has had a significant impact on me. I don't wish to at this stage go into detail about this but it has had a serious impact on my life and I have been to therapy classes to help me cope.

Statement of truth

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

I am willing for the statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and be published on the Inquiry's website

Signed:



Dated:

