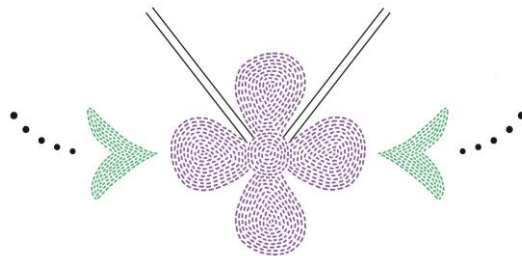


National Inquiry into  
Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale  
sur les femmes et les filles  
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Women and Girls  
Truth-Gathering Process  
Part 1 Statement Gathering  
Edmonton Inn & Conference Centre  
Edmonton, Alberta**



**PUBLIC**

**November 7, 2017**

**Statement Volume 80**

**George Desjarlais,  
In relation to Tonesha Walker**

**Statement gathered by Kerrie Reay**

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## II

### NOTE

Where not required by other statute, redactions to this public transcript have been made pursuant to Rule 55 of the Commission's *Legal Path: Rules of Respectful Practice*, which provides for "the discretion to redact private information of a sensitive nature where it is not material to the evidence to be given before distributing the information to the Parties. The National Inquiry will consider the public interest in releasing this type of information against the potential harmful impact on the individual whose personal information is at issue."

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Documents submitted by witness with oral testimony: none.

Edmonton, Alberta

1  
2 --- Upon commencing on Tuesday, November 7, 2017, at 9:15  
3 a.m.

4 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** All right. So you're  
5 ready, are you, George?

6 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

7 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay. So this is Kerrie  
8 Reay. I'm a statement taker with the National Inquiry into  
9 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls here at  
10 Edmonton, Alberta, and the date is November the 20 -- the  
11 7th of 2017, and the time is 9:15 a.m.

12 Today I am speaking with George Desjarlais  
13 of the Frog Lake Cree First Nation and who resides in High  
14 Prairie, Alberta, and we are here today to talk about the  
15 murder of your daughter, Tonesha River Walker, who was  
16 taken on July the 2nd of 2012 at the age of 16, and today  
17 with you is your brother Marcel Desjarlais and Belinda  
18 Lacombe (ph), who's a health support worker here with the  
19 Inquiry, and I just want to confirm that you are here  
20 voluntarily today, George, to give your truth, your story,  
21 and you agree to being videotaped.

22 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yes.

23 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay. All right. George,  
24 please -- please start.

25 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** On September 29th,

1           1995, myself and my partner at the time were blessed with a  
2           loud screaming baby just down the street here at the Royal  
3           Alex Hospital when she was born, and she was born, and it  
4           was probably about plus 33 that day, and to hear her cry  
5           was probably one of the things as we grew up I didn't want  
6           to hear. I thought I'd do whatever I could to provide for  
7           my kids 'cause we came from a big family, and we didn't  
8           always have what we wanted, but we were never, I guess,  
9           poor 'cause my parents were always working, and one of the  
10          goals I had as a dad was to give them everything I didn't  
11          have. I didn't want them to go without.

12                        And two years later she -- we had another  
13          daughter, and she was probably the first person to take  
14          care of her other than myself and my mom, you know. Right  
15          from when she was a kid, if she heard her sister cry, she  
16          would run over, bring her a bottle, try to calm her. You  
17          know, having her grow up, it was -- she was amazing that  
18          way. It didn't matter with who, and everyone, when she  
19          went to visit as a kid, they'd tell us how good she was,  
20          how she listened, how she helped around the house.

21                        And as she -- as -- she was about four when  
22          me and her mother split up, and we didn't get involved with  
23          maintenance or court. We just agreed that we would both do  
24          our best to raise our kids separately, and we did. As hard  
25          as it was, we both did our -- our share of the work, and

1           when it came to junior high, Tonesha and Sharon both living  
2           with me for the next five years.

3                       And as they got into school, you know, I'd  
4           always hear from teachers and principals like how much of a  
5           friend she was to everybody in the school. It didn't  
6           matter, didn't matter if you're white or Asian or native.  
7           She loved and treated everyone the same way. She was  
8           always laughing and joking with teachers.

9                       And we got into -- we'd always had culture  
10          in our lives, and one of the things she loved to do was  
11          dance powwow, and we travelled all over the place, and  
12          wherever we went, she always had friends, you know,  
13          and -- and she always would bring friends to the vehicle to  
14          visit us, to our camp, and most of the time they were  
15          three, four years younger than her, maybe seven years. She  
16          didn't mind hanging out with like seven years old, a kid  
17          seven years old when she was 15, you know. Some of her  
18          friends gave her a hard time. That's who she was.

19                      As she got into high school, she was an  
20          exceptional athlete, and even in junior high they played  
21          basketball together, and when they got into high school,  
22          they -- she was always selected as being, I guess,  
23          the -- to be a role model for the school. If she had to go  
24          out of the school on trips, she was the role model. She  
25          was selected to go to Ottawa and represent the school on an

1 exchange for seven days, and when she had got back, she  
2 had -- it was, I guess, eye opening for her because she  
3 realized that a lot of what was holding her back was her  
4 own fear, and when -- when she came home, she -- she joined  
5 the grad committee. Even though she wasn't going to  
6 graduate that year, she joined the grad committee as the  
7 photographer 'cause she said she wanted to be the president  
8 when she graduates, so she could learn how to do it -- do  
9 it and do it better, and one of the funny things is as she  
10 was the photographer, she was taking like pictures, and the  
11 principal was on the stage, and it said class of 2011, and  
12 there happened to be balloons in front of the C and the L,  
13 and only she showed the principal, and it said ass of 2011,  
14 and that was the -- the principal actually did the eulogy  
15 at her funeral.

16 But one of the things I really need to point  
17 out is when we were apart, we never said or used it as an  
18 excuse for single parents. We -- we did our best, and we  
19 had help from our -- the grandparents on both sides, and it  
20 was never an excuse for us to fall back on and say if she  
21 failed at something it was because she was a single parent,  
22 and it motivated her to work harder, and she was -- had  
23 honours in both -- half her classes, and then in two years  
24 of high school she had 95 credits out of 100 to graduate,  
25 and after her death, she was the first person in Alberta to

1 be posthumously awarded a diploma. Her basketball teacher  
2 and the principal, they both lobbied for that.

3 But she was -- like I said, she never  
4 used coming from a -- I guess a broken family is what it  
5 was, but we never used it as an excuse. She worked, she  
6 went to school, participated in culture. She was a great  
7 role model for anyone.

8 And when we get to 2012, there was just the  
9 three of us at home, and, you know, we did everything  
10 together, and we even -- she ended up working with me at  
11 the hockey arena in High Prairie, and, again, basketball  
12 and marks, and she was looking forward to graduating, and  
13 we had come down to Edmonton (indiscernible) at the end of  
14 the year in 2012, July 30th. We come to my oldest  
15 daughter's graduation, and then the next day we went to the  
16 Ponoka Stampede as a family to celebrate end of school,  
17 beginning of summer, and then on Sunday, it was Sharon's  
18 birthday, and Tonesha and I were about to head home, and  
19 then she was like, well, we don't have to work tomorrow  
20 since it was Canada Day, and there was -- happened to be a  
21 powwow in Alexander First Nation, which was on the way  
22 home.

23 So we were -- we left Edmonton, and we  
24 decided to stop in just to check it out, and we said,  
25 well -- it ended up getting later, so we decided to stay



1 another night in Edmonton at her aunt's house, which was  
2 just across the Yellowhead Highway, and that was the night  
3 she was murdered.

4 So we'd gotten home probably about 2 a.m.,  
5 and I couldn't sleep, and it must have been about 5:00  
6 'cause the sun was starting to come up. It was -- the sun  
7 wasn't up, but you could see, and I heard a bang on the  
8 wall and then I heard another one, and I didn't think  
9 anything of it because she slept on a single bed at home in  
10 her room, and sometimes it was normal for her to hit her  
11 leg or arm on the wall, and then the light turned on in the  
12 room I was in, and I thought it was her cousin Star. I  
13 looked, and I recognized the boy didn't belong in the  
14 house, and then he looked at me and he turned as white as a  
15 ghost, and then he had his hand in a bag by the door, and  
16 I -- I got up to go after him, and he got up and started  
17 running down the hallway, so I just got to the entrance of  
18 the bedroom I was in. I was stepping out, and Tonesha come  
19 into my side view, reaching out to me, and she said, I  
20 think he cut my neck, I think he cut my neck, dad, and she  
21 was grabbing it, and then I looked, [*two lines redacted*  
22 *pursuant to Rule 55*], and I immediately grabbed her and we  
23 went down the hallway.

24 I took her to the couch, and as I was taking  
25 there, I was grabbing -- I was grabbing towels. I was

1           grabbing -- I was grabbing the phone from the house, [two  
2           *lines redacted pursuant to Rule 55*] and we get to the  
3           couch, and I'm holding her and telling her I love her and  
4           that she loves me, and you can just hear -- you could just  
5           literally see the colour leaving her body. That's how fast  
6           she was bleeding. I got ahold of the ambulance, and they  
7           were there within three, four minutes, but she was already  
8           gone, and when they had gotten there, they had -- they had  
9           opened her shirt up and started to use the defibrillator on  
10          her about five times, and by then I had gotten to  
11          the -- the door, and I -- I pointed out the boy that was on  
12          the street that was with that kid. I said, That's him, but  
13          I -- I didn't know it wasn't a cop, but it was the fire  
14          chief, but the fire chief was able to identify him and  
15          point out to the cops, and when the cops got there,  
16          they -- they picked him up right away.

17                        So after watching them work on her, and I  
18          was taken out into a police cruiser, and I saw them as they  
19          brought out the gurney to the ambulance. They didn't tell  
20          me right away, but I knew she was already passed away  
21          because her face was covered when they brought her out of  
22          the house, and then they brought out -- one of the kids  
23          from the basement was brought out, her cousin, but they  
24          thought it was -- he was one of the suspects, but they -- I  
25          remember seeing that, and I remember seeing this hotel as

1 we drove by to the Edmonton headquarters 'cause by now it  
2 was about 5:30 in the morning, and they still hadn't told  
3 me officially anything 'til I went down to the station and  
4 did my statement.

5 So I did my statement, and then I went out  
6 into the bathroom. The next thing I remember was getting  
7 picked up off the floor by two EPS members. You know, they  
8 were telling me they didn't -- they didn't know what to say  
9 to me. One of them had a daughter that was like 12 years  
10 old. So they helped me back to the waiting area, and there  
11 is where I -- I found out for the first time that she was  
12 officially gone when I seen the ladies from the Victim  
13 Services.

14 But as I was in [Detective 1]'s office, I  
15 sat there and we were talking. I gave my statement, and  
16 after I gave my statement, he -- he left, and then he come  
17 back, and he had in his desk these unsolved murders or  
18 missing women, and he told me how long he'd been on the  
19 force, and he said, The next thing I'm going to say to you,  
20 he said, is I'm sorry, but I have to tell you how lucky you  
21 are.

22 At the time I didn't understand. Hearing  
23 him telling me how lucky I was at that moment, I was kind  
24 of stunned, but he opened the door to his drawer, the  
25 bottom drawer on his desk, and it was full. He said, These

1 people are still waiting for answers, these people don't  
2 have suspects, these are years old, some of them have been  
3 here since I've been here, and then he opened the next  
4 drawer and put my statement in there, and he said, This is  
5 the ones that have a suspect, are going to trial or in  
6 trial, and it was probably like about -- the ratio was  
7 probably like 25 to 1 in files.

8 But after that I went to my brother's, and  
9 my niece Breanna (ph) was the first one to see me with the  
10 cops, and I'd never been in trouble, so she knew something  
11 was wrong when I got to her door.

12 And growing up, whenever we had gone to a  
13 funeral and people said there was a lot of people, my dad  
14 would say, That person earned that, people come there  
15 because of the people they were, and when I met my dad, I  
16 think it was that Monday night, and my mom. They both said  
17 the same thing to me 'cause we had -- we had lost my  
18 brother when I was young in a car accident, and they said,  
19 That's the hardest thing you're ever going to have to go  
20 through is losing a child; there's nothing I can tell you  
21 to make it better. So we did all -- all that, and my  
22 brother has been with me right from probably July 3rd and  
23 closer, did so much for us.

24 So we got to the Park Memorial Funeral home,  
25 and, you know, you always think of your kids outliving you,

1 but picking out a casket when you could have been picking  
2 out a wedding gown, graduation dress, standing in a wedding  
3 party, not picking out pallbearers. 16-year-old kid. All  
4 she did was love. Didn't matter, young or old.

5 So I had moments to be with her for the last  
6 time at the funeral home, and we were deciding what to wear  
7 for her, so I put her in her powwow outfit 'cause her  
8 powwow outfit was where she said there was no hate for her.  
9 It's a place where I can be myself, said she was happiest  
10 when she was dancing. So we sent her home in her powwow  
11 outfit. I remember running my hands through her hair  
12 before it was braided, talking to her and saying what I had  
13 to say.

14 So at the funeral in Slave Lake, it was two  
15 nights and wake, and one day was the funeral. So we were  
16 there, and Marcel comes to me on the second night of the  
17 wake, and he was like, This place is too small, there's  
18 going to be a lot of people, and I think it was the mayor  
19 of the town that offered the new recreation centre for us  
20 to have the funeral service, so I agreed, and there was  
21 probably over a thousand people there from all over. You  
22 know, there was condolences from B.C. down to California to  
23 Oklahoma, Ontario. Ontario they even organized a walk  
24 'cause they did one in High Prairie too.

25 As we were driving over the -- after we left

1 the funeral, we were driving over the Highway 2, and I  
2 remember seeing the cops with their -- saluting as we drove  
3 by. You know, I thought like, wow, you know, that was  
4 amazing, a lot of people turn out, and I thought about what  
5 my dad said how people show up because they earned that.

6 Now, it had started to -- after the funeral,  
7 me getting into the trial now, and he pled not guilty and  
8 whatnot, so -- but he was remanded into custody for 18  
9 months. I kept telling my family not to come because I  
10 wanted them to remember her for what she was, and I didn't  
11 want them seeing pictures or nothing.

12 I knew going into the trial not to expect  
13 justice from the legal system. Within a week of the  
14 funeral I was contacted by a lawyer friend of mine who was  
15 telling me not to expect more than seven years for this  
16 boy. He told me, Don't expect justice to come from the  
17 court, they're just going to let you down.

18 So we talked about it off and on and back  
19 and forth, and one of the -- one of the problems with the  
20 trial was that the boy was drunk when this had happened,  
21 and the only thing they had was a drunken confession. The  
22 Edmonton Police Service used up their annual budget for DNA  
23 analysis on this one case.

24 And I still remember going to the Crown  
25 prosecutor's office before the trial, before the -- before

1 the sentencing because he had changed -- they  
2 plea-bargained out to a guilty plea before pretrial, so I  
3 came to the sentencing that day, and this is where I really  
4 got let down. You know, I'm sitting, I'm looking in this  
5 prisoner's box. He's sitting there, but he was -- he was  
6 out before this.

7 So as they're speaking, the Crown prosecutor  
8 is asked if he has closing arguments, and at this time he  
9 got up to say that we had nothing to say except that this  
10 boy had turned his life around, was expecting a child, was  
11 working in high school and that -- working to finish his  
12 high school and he had a part-time job, and the defence  
13 lawyer's looking over at him, and she has a funny look on  
14 her face. I'll never forget that look 'cause I knew she  
15 was thinking what I was thinking. Why is the Crown  
16 prosecutor talking highly of this killer? And I'm like  
17 aren't you supposed to be working for us, the victims?  
18 Like she had all the things you're bragging up about this  
19 kid taken away from her. She had those same opportunities.  
20 She was working. She can't be a mother now. No. All  
21 those things in that moment I realized that were taken away  
22 from her, but what let me down was who was delivering the  
23 message was the Crown prosecutor.

24 So after he spoke, the defence attorney was  
25 asked if she had anything to say, and she says, No, I

1 believe my colleague said it all, we'll await your  
2 sentence, and he was sentenced to seven years but was  
3 credited with time served, and he left -- we left down the  
4 same elevator. Same doors he walked in, he walked out.

5 So we had left with [Detective 1] down  
6 the -- down the elevator, my wife and the Crown prosecutor,  
7 and I guess at that point my anger got the best of me, and  
8 I let that Crown prosecutor know exactly what I felt, you  
9 know, how I was let down, and I told him. I said, I knew  
10 not to expect much from you's, but this is like a joke.  
11 You know, you're talking about this kid how he was going to  
12 finish high school, how he was expecting a child. I said,  
13 That -- I don't think that was your job to do. Those are  
14 the same things he took from my daughter, and I think if  
15 that -- that elevator ride was any longer, I'd probably be  
16 in more trouble, but that -- that for me is the biggest  
17 part where I got let down in this whole -- whole  
18 experience, you know.

19 I remember thinking like three, four weeks  
20 ago, a month ago about these hearings. I thought it's just  
21 a waste of time again. Like do I just go there and go  
22 through all these things again just to get let down again.  
23 You know, does it have to be an MLA's daughter to die  
24 before something happens? Maybe some high-profile white  
25 person has to die before someone listens, before there's



1 actual change, and that's the message I brought here today.

2 It doesn't matter if they're white, Asian,  
3 black, native. We're all the same, but as soon as we get  
4 to the court, we're not the same. You know, native people  
5 get treated with the hard side of the law. White people,  
6 they -- they get the -- they get the feather treatment.  
7 You know, they get -- ever get beat with a feather? That's  
8 the way I look at it, you know. It's a joke.

9 You know, this -- like I was listening  
10 yesterday for the stats when Willie Littlechild was  
11 speaking. He said when he first got into this, he heard of  
12 3, 400 missing, you know, and it's sad. It's sad that the  
13 media controls a lot of what the message is out there. You  
14 know, they try downplay these girls as prostitutes, drug  
15 users or alcoholics, but they're not. They're someone's  
16 daughter, someone's sister, someone's aunt, you know, and  
17 then if you ever read a story of native people in trouble,  
18 they always want to say alcohol is involved, but if it's a  
19 white person, it's like they don't want to jump to  
20 conclusions or speculation at this time, more on the story  
21 later. You know, it's always covered up.

22 You know, and I remember it was like  
23 something was telling me to be here, something, someone.  
24 You know, there has to be something done, something with  
25 real results. I remember the residential school hearings

1 and hearing those things. My mom went to residential  
2 school. I don't speak Cree fluently because we went to a  
3 Catholic school, and she didn't want us to go through the  
4 same types of abuse. You know, it's -- we always get told  
5 oh, get over it, you know, but every generation, we have  
6 our own -- our own battle, you know, residential school or  
7 sterilization of native women, the Sixties Scoop. Now it's  
8 missing and murdered Indigenous women. You know, how bad  
9 does it have to get before something's actually done?

10 I don't -- I -- I felt probably like a lot  
11 of these people felt, it's a waste of time, but I decided  
12 to come. I said, Someone's got to hear that. You know,  
13 it's -- her death, yes, it's sad. That's what she has in  
14 common with a lot of people. She was a role model. She  
15 wasn't a drug user.

16 You know, what's lost in all this is the  
17 fact that the court is a system that will fail us all the  
18 time if it continues to run the way it is. You know, maybe  
19 they don't want this Inquiry to fully expose the problems  
20 because they will find out that, yeah, Canada does have a  
21 history that's not so good. You know, they'll learn of all  
22 the abuses from residential school. You know, that's not  
23 something you -- you just pay off and forget, and now I'm  
24 hearing those records are being destroyed. You know, like  
25 that's sad.

1                   You know, Canada -- the governments are  
2                   going to be -- after this Inquiry they're going to find  
3                   that they had a hand in this, the police had a hand in  
4                   this, the legal system had a hand in this. You know how  
5                   many times people, oh, wait 24 hours, the way they get  
6                   treated by the cops. You know, I don't have that nightmare  
7                   of that, I guess, systemic racism that most of these people  
8                   experience from the police, you know. Again, I remember  
9                   that cop saying, You're lucky, but am I?

10                   You know, I really hope that something does  
11                   come of this, something real, that all these girls, their  
12                   deaths isn't for -- for nothing as it seems it is right  
13                   now.

14                   I guess it would have to, like I said,  
15                   having these MLAs or the police to go through. Do they  
16                   have to experience what we did before they realize that the  
17                   system that is failing now? I think that's all I have to  
18                   say on that.

19                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** That look a lot of  
20                   courage, and I -- you know, the pain is still very real. I  
21                   can see that. I can feel that. So I just want to say  
22                   thank you, but if you don't mind, I have a few questions.

23                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

24                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** So you said that the  
25                   policing aspect of the investigation, you didn't experience

1 a lot of the challenges and struggles that other First  
2 Nations --

3 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

4 MS. KERRIE REAY: -- have with the police --

5 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

6 MS. KERRIE REAY: -- where you felt -- I can  
7 use the words -- hit a wall was with the court system.

8 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

9 MS. KERRIE REAY: One of the things you  
10 spoke about was what the Crown prosecutor, the comments --

11 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

12 MS. KERRIE REAY: -- that he made. Would  
13 you support a request to have the commissioners look at the  
14 transcript from that trial?

15 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah, I would.

16 MS. KERRIE REAY: Because to -- to read  
17 something such as you've described where a prosecutor is  
18 giving information that really should be --

19 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: M'hm.

20 MS. KERRIE REAY: -- from the defence rather  
21 than providing information of the impact --

22 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

23 MS. KERRIE REAY: -- that it's had for the  
24 family, that that could be part of the legacy of this  
25 Commission in terms of your daughter and the loss.

1                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, 'cause unless  
2                   you were in the courthouse, you didn't hear it.

3                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right. So I will request  
4                   as part of -- of your truth, your story that the  
5                   commissioners see that and -- and get that transcript  
6                   ordered.

7                   The -- the other part in terms of the legal  
8                   system, you spoke when you were with the police that there  
9                   was a lady with Victim Services. Did you do a victim  
10                  impact statement for the court?

11                  **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

12                  **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

13                  **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yes.

14                  **MS. KERRIE REAY:** So they -- the judge did  
15                  have that.

16                  **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, he -- I was  
17                  able to read mine and -- because it was a -- there was a  
18                  plea deal for the verdict that I was the only one that was  
19                  able to read it.

20                  **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

21                  **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** And -- but there  
22                  was -- there was so many that were sent in.

23                  **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay. Now, if I may ask  
24                  for the purposes of the recording, without acknowledging  
25                  the person's name, the fellow who received seven years, was

1 he First Nation?

2 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah. Oh, that's  
3 the other thing. They -- they had -- as part of his  
4 sentencing, they went to his -- the Gladue report.

5 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Gladue report. Okay.

6 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** So I was like, yeah,  
7 it's like amazing that you look at the -- the suspect or  
8 the guy that murdered my daughter as having come from [*four*  
9 *lines redacted pursuant to the Youth Criminal Justice Act*]  
10 and whatnot, but if you care to look a little bit over to  
11 the other side of the courtroom, I was a single father, you  
12 know. They had the same opportunities. [*One line redacted*  
13 *pursuant to the Youth Criminal Justice Act*]. She never  
14 drank. She never did drugs. You know, and when I -- I  
15 read comments later before about the Gladue report, I told  
16 people straight out how I felt.

17 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Would you like to tell the  
18 Commission?

19 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, I think it's a  
20 joke. I don't think it's something that should be used in  
21 the court on -- on a broad basis. It should be  
22 case-by-case basis. It's -- for my daughter's life to be  
23 swept aside as it didn't matter, for her achievements, that  
24 everything she could have done to be pushed aside by the  
25 Gladue report and even a lighter sentence to her killer,

1 well, that's a joke. That's stupid. You know, sometimes  
2 you think you're doing something -- coming from a good  
3 place, but put yourself in my shoes. You realize that it's  
4 not fair. It's like -- to this -- to this day when I hear  
5 that word, them two words, it's -- you know, if only they  
6 had to experience it. You know, that's what I don't want.

7 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

8 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Like who speaks for  
9 the victims really, you know?

10 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And, in this case, for  
11 your daughter, who was also First Nation whose grandmother  
12 went to residential school and the kindness and the caring  
13 and the life that she led full of love and caring for other  
14 people, you know, what part of that was -- was fair?  
15 So -- and speaking, you -- you talked about how she loved  
16 to dance and said she did a lot of the powwow.

17 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

18 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And you said that when  
19 she -- when she danced she felt that there was no hate.

20 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah. She said  
21 that's where she felt the happiest was dancing.

22 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** So I -- I'm just  
23 wondering, because when you talked about her kindness and  
24 her caring for -- for anybody, regardless of race and age,  
25 did she experience hate? Did she experience that somewhere

1           that she felt that to dance --

2                       **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Well, a lot of it  
3           was peer pressure, you know.

4                       **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

5                       **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Like if she was with  
6           the white kids at school, the native kids, oh, you think  
7           you're better than us.

8                       **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

9                       **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** You know, or if  
10          you're hanging with the -- like she had Filipino friends on  
11          the basketball team. You know, and it's like -- you know,  
12          she basically people that -- she attracted people to her  
13          that were going through probably rough times their self  
14          [sic].

15                      Like there was one young girl who was a  
16          basketball player as well, but (indiscernible) too small.  
17          You know, it's like not the size of the dog in the fight,  
18          it's the size of the fight in the dog, she'd tell her  
19          friend, eh, and so she -- she came to play basketball, and  
20          she played hard and she made the team even though she was  
21          probably five feet, you know, and after her death, that was  
22          one of the things that girl thanked me for, was, you know,  
23          I can never thank her enough because if it wasn't for her,  
24          that advice she gave me, not just for basketball but for  
25          life, you know.



1                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right. Right.

2                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** When -- when she did  
3 dance, you know -- like no one can talk to you when you're  
4 dancing or say anything to you. From the start to the end  
5 of the song is when she said she felt the happiest, because  
6 of that, no one can say anything.

7                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right, and you felt that  
8 last night with the jingle dance --

9                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

10                  **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- as they went around.

11                  **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

12                  **MS. KERRIE REAY:** They were very, very much  
13 into their -- into their dance and their story.

14                  **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

15                  **MS. KERRIE REAY:** One of the things that the  
16 Commission is looking at is is there any way you think that  
17 they could -- that the Inquiry could honour or commemorate  
18 your daughter? Is there anything that you thought of that  
19 you would have liked to see to acknowledge what a kind and  
20 caring person she was and was she offered -- it sounds to  
21 me like from some of the things that you've said is she  
22 offered hope to other people.

23                  **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, she did. She  
24 did a lot of things, and -- you know, but one of the things  
25 that -- when I was -- I was in the Saddle Centre watching

1           volleyball, and I was like, hey, King's College is here.  
2           Like why is that familiar? I was walking in, and I was  
3           looking at this lady and she's looking at me, and she's  
4           staring at me, and we had that moment where you went I know  
5           this person.

6                           I had met her at a basketball tournament,  
7           and she had asked us if my daughter would consider playing  
8           college basketball for King's College, and she was telling  
9           me, You know, dad, I'm not too sure about that King's  
10          College. I was like, Why? 'Cause we don't go to church.  
11          We have our culture. I said, Well, prayer is prayer, I  
12          said, but I remember having to tell that coach that, yeah,  
13          she -- she was murdered. You know, that was the day the  
14          trials for the team started.

15                          I guess if I was to ask for anything that  
16          her -- for the Inquiry to achieve would probably have to be  
17          as soon as it gets into the courts, the victims are  
18          forgotten. It's all about the suspects, suspects.  
19          It's -- like who speaks for them?

20                          **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And who speaks for the  
21          First Nations of the Indigenous women and girls?

22                          **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** That's right.  
23          (Indiscernible). I think it was like as soon as it got to  
24          court, it was like, okay, everything you've done now  
25          doesn't matter 'cause it's all about the suspect. You

1 know, there has to be something more than a victim impact  
2 statement.

3 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And in your experience  
4 have you been able to think what that might look like,  
5 what -- what -- what other avenue or other way the families  
6 could have more of a role or more of an impact in the court  
7 process? That's a tough question.

8 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

9 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** You know, and I -- and I  
10 realize that, but you've had -- you've had some time.

11 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** I'm not sure only a  
12 victim impact statement is the right way to go. I think  
13 that's basically just, okay, we're doing something but not  
14 much.

15 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** What do you think would  
16 have helped you and your family?

17 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Probably something  
18 more, something more to the effect that maybe it could have  
19 been the Crown prosecutor or somebody to speak on, okay --

20 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** A little bit more  
21 passionately of --

22 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** We're missing  
23 our -- our daughter here.

24 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- about Tonesha.

25 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

1                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Yeah.

2                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** That's the whole  
3 point I didn't tell my family to come to court was to  
4 protect them.

5                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right. Right, and I think  
6 with your consent to the -- to have that transcript come to  
7 the Commission, I think that would be an important step --

8                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** M'hm.

9                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- to at least put that  
10 front and centre to say, you know, here's the transcript,  
11 and your Crown prosecutor is supporting the -- doing the  
12 job of the defence.

13                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yes. I don't  
14 understand all the legalities that made the sentence what  
15 it was.

16                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right. Right.

17                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** But to me  
18 it's -- doesn't matter because I don't think -- I don't  
19 think the impact was made on our behalf, the amount of  
20 people that are actually affected by this loss.

21                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right. Yeah.

22                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** You know, it  
23 seems -- I'll say it again that as soon as it gets to  
24 court, it seems like the victims are forgotten.

25                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right. Now, just sort

1 of -- I'm thinking in terms of the legacy of your story.  
2 Are there or was there anything in the papers, pictures of  
3 the -- of all the people that were at Tonesha's funeral,  
4 anything that sort of captures just how loved she was by so  
5 many people that we could, you know, include as a  
6 documentation? And it doesn't have to be today. I  
7 can -- we can follow up with you to see if there's  
8 something that we could add to your story in terms of  
9 documentation, and, like I said, it doesn't have to be  
10 today, it doesn't have to be next week, but somewhere in  
11 here in the future that we could contact you to see if  
12 there is anything to point us in the direction.

13 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** M'hm.

14 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** You know, a newspaper,  
15 well, we can pull those articles or pictures, so --

16 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Okay.

17 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- I'll leave that with  
18 you.

19 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** The only other thing  
20 that we -- that we do every year is we have a memorial  
21 basketball tournament.

22 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Oh, really.

23 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** It used to be called  
24 the E.W. Pratt Invitational, and then after she was  
25 murdered, it's called the Tonesha River Walker Memorial

1 Tournament now.

2 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And where is that  
3 tournament?

4 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** It's in High  
5 Prairie.

6 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** It's in High Prairie.

7 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

8 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And it's a tournament that  
9 invites schools?

10 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Teams got to get in  
11 early 'cause it fills fast.

12 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

13 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** We've always been  
14 told that it's one of the best run, and the players look  
15 forward to the awards.

16 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay, and do they come  
17 from across the provinces or --

18 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

19 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- like --

20 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** They come from all  
21 over Alberta. It fills so fast.

22 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Wow. Wow. Well, that's  
23 quite -- that's quite a way to commemorate Tonesha. Is  
24 there anything else that you would like to add?

25 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Well, I think -- I

1 think more has to be done in the names of the victims as it  
2 goes through the judicial process, something as a liaison  
3 or something for the families.

4 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** An advocacy.

5 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, something to  
6 help them understand why or someone to be able to speak out  
7 other than the Crown prosecutor.

8 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right, and you had  
9 mentioned earlier that a friend of yours is a lawyer and  
10 sort of had given you -- given you sort of a --

11 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, he gave me a  
12 heads-up --

13 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- a heads-up --

14 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** -- yeah.

15 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- that, you know, not to  
16 expect something any more than seven years, so there was  
17 something in terms of his understanding of the legal system  
18 of about what to expect (indiscernible).

19 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, because it  
20 was -- because it was his first offence and his age, that  
21 he was a young offender, but even that is like -- you know,  
22 if you're -- if you're drinking, then you're doing adult  
23 things. I think you should be tried as an adult. If  
24 you're 16 using any type of weapon for violence, you should  
25 be tried as an adult.

1                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** So just as -- just as  
2 another question, so there was no raise hearing for this  
3 young person.

4                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Pardon?

5                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** There was no raise  
6 hearing, no hearing to see whether or not he should be  
7 tried as an adult?

8                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** No.

9                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay, and he was 16 at the  
10 time. Can I get your consent again to see if the  
11 Commission could look into the why or the why not that  
12 there was no -- and they may have considered it, but to try  
13 and understand what happened there in terms of somebody  
14 being 16 and the use of a weapon, why there wasn't -- you  
15 know, why there was a decision not to look at a raise  
16 hearing?

17                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, for sure.

18                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay. Okay. So  
19 there's -- the two things there are the transcript from  
20 particularly the end of the hearing --

21                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

22                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- the end of the trial.

23                   **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Sentencing.

24                   **MS. KERRIE REAY:** The sentencing aspect and  
25 that he was what they call a young offender and he was 16



1 using a weapon and around the issue of -- of a raise  
2 hearing, why not. Okay. Anything else? Anything else?

3 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** No, not that I can  
4 think of.

5 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

6 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** I'm sure my brother  
7 had lots to say.

8 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay. Well, this is your  
9 space today. If your brother would like to say something,  
10 we can certainly have an opportunity for him to do the same  
11 thing. It's just about registering, and we can -- we can  
12 speak a little bit more once -- once we turn the recording  
13 off, but I just want to thank you for the courage, as I  
14 said before, the phenomenal courage it takes to come here  
15 to the Inquiry, and I'm glad you did because you said you  
16 weren't -- you weren't sure about doing that.

17 **MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

18 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And you have a very  
19 important story, and I think it's very -- it's very  
20 critical that when we hear information like this, when the  
21 commissioners hear information like this where the  
22 prosecutor is actually doing the defence work and not the  
23 work for people like Tonesha, I think that is critical to  
24 this Inquiry and to recommendations moving forward, so I'd  
25 like to thank you, and so with that, it is 10:10. I have

1 my watch (indiscernible) very quickly. Yes. Okay. So I'm  
2 just going to turn this off.  
3 --- Upon adjourning at 10:10 a.m.

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Shawn Hurd, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.

Shawn Hurd.

Shawn Hurd

March 8, 2018