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Truth-Gathering Process
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Statement Volume 80

George Desjarlais,
In relation to Tonesha Walker

Statement gathered by Kerrie Reay

INTERNATIONAL REPORTING INC.
41-5450 Canotek Road, Ottawa, Ontario, K1J 9G2
E-mail: info@irri.net – Phone: 613-748-6043 – Fax: 613-748-8246
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NOTE

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

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

**MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

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

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

**MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yes.

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

**MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** On September 29th,
1995, myself and my partner at the time were blessed with a loud screaming baby just down the street here at the Royal Alex Hospital when she was born, and she was born, and it was probably about plus 33 that day, and to hear her cry was probably one of the things as we grew up I didn't want to hear. I thought I'd do whatever I could to provide for my kids 'cause we came from a big family, and we didn't always have what we wanted, but we were never, I guess, poor 'cause my parents were always working, and one of the goals I had as a dad was to give them everything I didn't have. I didn't want them to go without.

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

And as she -- as -- she was about four when me and her mother split up, and we didn't get involved with maintenance or court. We just agreed that we would both do our best to raise our kids separately, and we did. As hard as it was, we both did our -- our share of the work, and
when it came to junior high, Tonesha and Sharon both living with me for the next five years.

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

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

As she got into high school, she was an exceptional athlete, and even in junior high they played basketball together, and when they got into high school, they -- she was always selected as being, I guess, the -- to be a role model for the school. If she had to go out of the school on trips, she was the role model. She was selected to go to Ottawa and represent the school on an
exchange for seven days, and when she had got back, she
had -- it was, I guess, eye opening for her because she
realized that a lot of what was holding her back was her
own fear, and when -- when she came home, she -- she joined
the grad committee. Even though she wasn't going to
graduate that year, she joined the grad committee as the
photographer 'cause she said she wanted to be the president
when she graduates, so she could learn how to do it -- do
it and do it better, and one of the funny things is as she
was the photographer, she was taking like pictures, and the
principal was on the stage, and it said class of 2011, and
there happened to be balloons in front of the C and the L,
and only she showed the principal, and it said ass of 2011,
and that was the -- the principal actually did the eulogy
at her funeral.

But one of the things I really need to point
out is when we were apart, we never said or used it as an
excuse for single parents. We -- we did our best, and we
had help from our -- the grandparents on both sides, and it
was never an excuse for us to fall back on and say if she
failed at something it was because she was a single parent,
and it motivated her to work harder, and she was -- had
honours in both -- half her classes, and then in two years
of high school she had 95 credits out of 100 to graduate,
and after her death, she was the first person in Alberta to
be posthumously awarded a diploma. Her basketball teacher and the principal, they both lobbied for that.

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

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

So we were -- we left Edmonton, and we decided to stop in just to check it out, and we said, well -- it ended up getting later, so we decided to stay
another night in Edmonton at her aunt's house, which was just across the Yellowhead Highway, and that was the night she was murdered.

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

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

So after watching them work on her, and I
was taken out into a police cruiser, and I saw them as they
brought out the gurney to the ambulance. They didn't tell
me right away, but I knew she was already passed away
because her face was covered when they brought her out of
the house, and then they brought out -- one of the kids
from the basement was brought out, her cousin, but they
thought it was -- he was one of the suspects, but they -- I
remember seeing that, and I remember seeing this hotel as
we drove by to the Edmonton headquarters 'cause by now it
was about 5:30 in the morning, and they still hadn't told
me officially anything 'til I went down to the station and
did my statement.

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

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

At the time I didn't understand. Hearing
him telling me how lucky I was at that moment, I was kind
of stunned, but he opened the door to his drawer, the
bottom drawer on his desk, and it was full. He said, These
people are still waiting for answers, these people don't have suspects, these are years old, some of them have been here since I've been here, and then he opened the next drawer and put my statement in there, and he said, This is the ones that have a suspect, are going to trial or in trial, and it was probably like about -- the ratio was probably like 25 to 1 in files.

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

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

So we got to the Park Memorial Funeral home, and, you know, you always think of your kids outliving you,
but picking out a casket when you could have been picking
out a wedding gown, graduation dress, standing in a wedding
party, not picking out pallbearers. 16-year-old kid. All
she did was love. Didn't matter, young or old.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And I still remember going to the Crown prosecutor's office before the trial, before the -- before
the sentencing because he had changed -- they
plea-bargained out to a guilty plea before pretrial, so I
came to the sentencing that day, and this is where I really
got let down. You know, I'm sitting, I'm looking in this
prisoner's box. He's sitting there, but he was -- he was
out before this.

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

So after he spoke, the defence attorney was
asked if she had anything to say, and she says, No, I
believe my colleague said it all, we'll await your sentence, and he was sentenced to seven years but was credited with time served, and he left -- we left down the same elevator. Same doors he walked in, he walked out.

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

I remember thinking like three, four weeks ago, a month ago about these hearings. I thought it's just a waste of time again. Like do I just go there and go through all these things again just to get let down again. You know, does it have to be an MLA's daughter to die before something happens? Maybe some high-profile white person has to die before someone listens, before there's
actual change, and that's the message I brought here today.

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

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

You know, and I remember it was like something was telling me to be here, something, someone. You know, there has to be something done, something with real results. I remember the residential school hearings
and hearing those things. My mom went to residential school. I don't speak Cree fluently because we went to a Catholic school, and she didn't want us to go through the same types of abuse. You know, it's -- we always get told oh, get over it, you know, but every generation, we have our own -- our own battle, you know, residential school or sterilization of native women, the Sixties Scoop. Now it's missing and murdered Indigenous women. You know, how bad does it have to get before something's actually done?

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

You know, what's lost in all this is the fact that the court is a system that will fail us all the time if it continues to run the way it is. You know, maybe they don't want this Inquiry to fully expose the problems because they will find out that, yeah, Canada does have a history that's not so good. You know, they'll learn of all the abuses from residential school. You know, that's not something you -- you just pay off and forget, and now I'm hearing those records are being destroyed. You know, like that's sad.
You know, Canada -- the governments are going to be -- after this Inquiry they're going to find that they had a hand in this, the police had a hand in this, the legal system had a hand in this. You know how many times people, oh, wait 24 hours, the way they get treated by the cops. You know, I don't have that nightmare of that, I guess, systemic racism that most of these people experience from the police, you know. Again, I remember that cop saying, You're lucky, but am I?

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

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

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So you said that the policing aspect of the investigation, you didn't experience
a lot of the challenges and struggles that other First Nations --

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah, I would.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: M'hm.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

MS. KERRIE REAY: -- that it's had for the family, that that could be part of the legacy of this Commission in terms of your daughter and the loss.
MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah, 'cause unless you were in the courthouse, you didn't hear it.

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

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yes.

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

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

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Now, if I may ask for the purposes of the recording, without acknowledging the person's name, the fellow who received seven years, was
George Desjarlais
(Tonesha Walker)

he First Nation?

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

MS. KERRIE REAY: Gladue report. Okay.

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

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah, I think it's a
joke. I don't think it's something that should be used in
the court on -- on a broad basis. It should be
case-by-case basis. It's -- for my daughter's life to be
swept aside as it didn't matter, for her achievements, that
everything she could have done to be pushed aside by the
Gladue report and even a lighter sentence to her killer,
well, that's a joke. That's stupid. You know, sometimes you think you're doing something -- coming from a good place, but put yourself in my shoes. You realize that it's not fair. It's like -- to this -- to this day when I hear that word, them two words, it's -- you know, if only they had to experience it. You know, that's what I don't want.

**MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

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

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

**MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah.

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

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

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

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

**MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

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

**MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

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

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

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

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah, she did. She did a lot of things, and -- you know, but one of the things that -- when I was -- I was in the Saddle Centre watching
volleyball, and I was like, hey, King's College is here.

Like why is that familiar? I was walking in, and I was looking at this lady and she's looking at me, and she's staring at me, and we had that moment where you went I know this person.

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

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

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: That's right.

(Indiscernible). I think it was like as soon as it got to court, it was like, okay, everything you've done now doesn't matter 'cause it's all about the suspect. You
know, there has to be something more than a victim impact statement.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MS. KERRIE REAY: -- about Tonesha.

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.
Statement - Public
George Desjarlais
(Tonesha Walker)

MS. KERRIE REAY: Yeah.

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

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: M'hm.

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

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

MS. KERRIE REAY: Right. Right.

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

MS. KERRIE REAY: Right. Yeah.

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

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: M'hm.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Okay.

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

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

MS. KERRIE REAY: Oh, really.

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

George Desjarlais
(Tonesha Walker)

1 Tournament now.

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

3 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: It's in High Prairie.

4 MS. KERRIE REAY: It's in High Prairie.

5 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

6 MS. KERRIE REAY: And it's a tournament that invites schools?

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

8 MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.

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

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

11 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

12 MS. KERRIE REAY: -- like --

13 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: They come from all over Alberta. It fills so fast.

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

15 MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Well, I think -- I
think more has to be done in the names of the victims as it goes through the judicial process, something as a liaison or something for the families.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS:** Yeah, because it was -- because it was his first offence and his age, that he was a young offender, but even that is like -- you know, if you're -- if you're drinking, then you're doing adult things. I think you should be tried as an adult. If you're 16 using any type of weapon for violence, you should be tried as an adult.
MS. KERRIE REAY: So just as -- just as another question, so there was no raise hearing for this young person.

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Pardon?

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: No.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah, for sure.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

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

MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Sentencing.

MS. KERRIE REAY: The sentencing aspect and that he was what they call a young offender and he was 16
using a weapon and around the issue of -- of a raise

hearing, why not. Okay. Anything else? Anything else?

    MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: No, not that I can

 think of.

    MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.

    MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: I'm sure my brother

 had lots to say.

    MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Well, this is your

 space today. If your brother would like to say something,

 we can certainly have an opportunity for him to do the same

 thing. It's just about registering, and we can -- we can

 speak a little bit more once -- once we turn the recording

 off, but I just want to thank you for the courage, as I

 said before, the phenomenal courage it takes to come here

 to the Inquiry, and I'm glad you did because you said you

 weren't -- you weren't sure about doing that.

    MR. GEORGE DESJARLAIS: Yeah.

    MS. KERRIE REAY: And you have a very

 important story, and I think it's very -- it's very

 critical that when we hear information like this, when the

 commissioners hear information like this where the

 prosecutor is actually doing the defence work and not the

 work for people like Tonesha, I think that is critical to

 this Inquiry and to recommendations moving forward, so I'd

 like to thank you, and so with that, it is 10:10. I have
my watch (indiscernible) very quickly. Yes. Okay. So I'm just going to turn this off.

--- 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
March 8, 2018