National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Statement Gathering
Chateau Nova Hotel
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

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Statement - Volume 213

Joachim Bonnetrouge,
In relation to his son Delmer Bonnetrouge

Statement gathered by Frank Hope

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**January 25, 2018**

**Witness:** Joachim Bonnetrouge

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**Statement gatherer:** Frank Hope  
**Documents submitted with testimony:** none.
MR. FRANK HOPE: My name is Frank Hope, statement taker with the National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls at Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, on January 25th, 2018. We are at the Nova Court, and your name is?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Joachim Bonnetrouge.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. And we also have in the room mental health worker?

MR. ROY ERASMUS: Roy Erasmus.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. Mahsi. Mahsi for coming in, Joachim. What brings you in today, and what would you like the commissioners to know in regards to your story?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yes, I am -- I really appreciate this. My son Delmer has been missing for two-and-a-half years now. He went missing, I believe, April 18, 2015. We have not heard anything from him as of today. I guess it -- initially there was a lot of support in the community. Because of the time of the year, we thought maybe he had gone somewhere hunting, it was slippery, he may have fallen down, hurt
himself, but with huge support, we, we must have covered
at least 100 mile radius around Fort Providence and
there was even aerial -- aerial searches done by, I
think by the Canadian Forces and also some air searches
by the RCMP, I believe. So -- so we're pretty sure he
is not out there. I guess the -- when I was talking to
my wife about half an hour ago telling her I was
stopping here and I mentioned there was missing girls,
missing women and then Delmer is still missing. Delmer
is still gone. I started crying. I didn't realize it
was that close.

We've -- the -- I guess sometimes we --
we miss him so bad, I -- I guess he was such -- he was
-- he played such a big part in our family, and of all
his brothers and sisters, he's got -- he was the closest
to his mom. They've got a special connection. And
sometimes I -- sometimes we worry about his mom Nancy.
She cries sometimes. And I -- to this day, I miss him
tremendously. He -- I always was proud that he was such
a value to our community because -- just because he was
an electrician, and he was on call, helped people out
with their -- if their fridge broke down or furnace, and
also the other part, he had spent a lot of time with his
grandma and grandpa out in the bush, and he was
beginning to be a heck of a moose hunter. That's what I
personally really miss every fall time. Wish that he
would be here and help us fall hunting and so on.

And when we first reported a couple of
days when I phoned it in, they said there's going to be
somebody coming from the Yellowknife to visit us. And I
did that during the day, and right after supper, two
RCMP members an old truck, black truck came to our
house, and gosh, if it wasn't for my daughter, my
younger daughter being home, they started interrogating
me. And I had a sense that my son was missing and it
seemed like I was a number one suspect. But it is --
well, people say it is what it is.

And then as time went on, well, one of
the things was a few days later his aunt came to visit
from Hay River and she said she saw Delmer about a week
ago, she said, in front of the Royal Bank in Hay River.
And she said Delmer didn't look the same. Usually he's
kind of happy and teasing and good natured. Delmer
really seemed different and she said -- she said, well,
Delmer probably feeling he wasn't getting the breaks in
life and that he had gone off to look for happiness
somewhere.

MR. FRANK HOPE: So how long after he
was reported missing did she see him?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Before?
MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah, at the bank in Hay River?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, a week before.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Oh, a week before he went missing?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, yeah, he saw him in Hay River in front of the bank.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay.

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: So she said that and I got -- I got upset. Well, anyway, so -- and we were going through the searches, and every time with a ski-doo or a quad, somebody brings in a piece of clothing, a jacket, a shirt or something, they would call one of us and Nancy and I would rush over to the blue house, we call it. And sigh of relief, it wasn't Delmer's jacket so that went on about three, four, six months, so that's -- and then slowly I guess the encouragement, the support systems just kind of died off. But that first year, even though we didn't have very much money, we basically changed down every rumour or gossip or sighting even going -- kind of drove around High Level, even went to Lake St. Ann, and I went to visit Alexis First Nations their office, and even met with the chief there because we heard he was around that

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area to no avail. They didn't see him, just to follow up.

So things like that went on, and my biggest fear was -- but to backtrack a little bit, trying to -- Delmer went missing trying to come to terms with did he run away? Did he -- we had no clue, his mom didn't have no clue, his mom didn't have no clue where he had gone or why? But there is some sensitive background issues because even before that he moved out of the house, he was working in the mines back and forth and he had a relationship, a little baby with a woman in Fort Smith, things were going on back and forth. So he moved out for a while, we call it the six-plex in Fort Providence, an apartment, all what young people do, six-plex, how many times, three, four, five times, his little apartment got broken into. How many times we had to change the locks. There was a lot going on, the weekends, I guess, party, drinking. Young people, coming back and forth. So like you said, it went on for a while until -- until finally we said -- couldn't afford the -- couldn't afford the break-ins anymore, can't afford the rent, so he moved back in. He kept on working for [Company] building the new hospital in Hay River. He was an electrician.

So -- but then I heard he was getting
charged, so I asked him, I heard you're getting charged, you're supposed to -- and he said, dad, I don't want to talk about it. So just left it. Left it like that. And for the longest time, and I guess he missed two -- two court -- two court dates. No show. And then I saw something on Facebook, on the internet, and at the time, I was the chief too. And of course, headline, chief's son missing. And then CBC said -- it was alleged that chief son's had three charges against him. And it was to do with, I think it -- for about a year or so, I couldn't understand what the charges were because we -- in our communities and in the north and in our culture, we don't have that, that kind of stuff. It was something to do with luring or something or other, so we had those checked out. And people said, well, there's a couple of -- couple of girls, women that complained that Delmer was trying to do something with them or -- and then you know what, those two girls they do that kind of stuff, they said it might be extortion or what's it called, they're trying to get back at him.

So by -- so I met with a sergeant out of Hay River RCMP. Trying to find out what do they know, what are they doing to try and find him, and what we also did in the community, trying to tell them Delmer was missing. So it was pretty cordial. But then about
six months ago from today, I wrote a letter to the RCMP, G Division commander requesting if they would review his file. And we had a meeting here in Yellowknife, and spent a good hour with him and I found out later on that the RCMP's hands were tied because the original complaint came from the third party, so their hands were tied it may, it could very be like a school counsellor or a community counsellor. Legally there's -- if they hear something or suspect something they're supposed to report it, sexually or whatever. But under the Criminal Code, they're supposed to do that, that may have happened, so okay. That's okay. I -- so nothing happened, I think the RCMP has replied to the charges. And then about two months ago, I wrote another text to the commander requesting that on humanitarian health and humanitarian grounds, would they take another look at Delmer's file because [one line redacted - personal information] like his mom used to when he was a teenager, he suffers terribly. And an example when he was 12 years old, 16 years old [three lines redacted - personal information]. So I requested if they would consider -- his mom and I worry that if he doesn't care of himself while he's out there, wherever he is, he may suffer terribly unless somebody knows how to take care of [one line redacted - personal information]
information]. And so that, I guess like any mom and dad, worry about stuff like that that he be okay.

They -- the local corporal too, did say -- I had a meeting with him about a month ago, he said -- he's going to try and find Delmer, and he talked lots about closure. And I, I shared whole-heartedly with him what we went through, and some of the underlying possible reasons why he took flight if he did at all. Missing and haven't heard from him for two-and-a-half years. Wonder. And I -- and he said he was going to -- because of his own background and experience, he said he was going to -- he said he's going to find Delmer. And even last year, we got a message, said, hey, Delmer got arrested in Peace River. Holy man, for a while I got scared and then a few seconds later I was happy. Good gosh I'll see big bad again in a few days if he's arrested, but that was just gossip, rumour. Drunk talk whatever they do. But anyway, they -- I guess the nature of the complaint, I guess with -- because with luring for sexual favours or whatever it is, it will take a lawyer. The family would need to hire a lawyer to find out what -- what's the information. But like I don't think we want -- we want to go there yet. But -- and because of the nature of the charges, the three charges, it's shame based. And I
was chief at the time, and he is the kind of person that
he -- he probably didn't want to bring any shame upon
his dad. I was the chief. So it probably just go away.
And don't have to deal with kind of the shame based.
Something like a sexual assault or a rape kind of thing.
But -- but luring is, I still don't even understand.

Anyway, so that's, that's where it is
at right now. There was, yeah, I am concerned too
because I know about -- throughout Canada, throughout
the world, throughout the native communities maybe
because of Residential School, poor sexuality. Not
healthy way of boys and girls, men and women all that
kind of stuff. It's always there. But nobody -- nobody
wants to go there. And -- and talking about addiction,
there's -- and we're -- we're Dene and being a Dene
community there's two maybe three generations very
unhealthy relationships. Regarding respect for, you
know, now I think about if there's a girl, I will tell
my sons respect them like you respect your mom. That
kind of messaging young people just don't have. How
many generations, I don't know. There's a lot of
drinking in every community, and stuff happens and so I
guess that's why I -- to help -- because I am no
different than what my sons are going through, terrible
time with relationships -- relationships. Even as a
child, teenager, young man, I had a terrible time. Not much different than any other young native guy, I guess. Terrible time. Relationships. And Delmer, the truth be known, also had a terrible time with -- with relationships with girlfriends and women. Beginning was 19 years old, I think, I think he was terribly in love with a young Cowichan woman, girl, and she went home. And I think it took him about a year, year-and-a-half to get over her. And then before you know it, he's working in Edmonton with a girlfriend from Saskatchewan and it didn't work out, but as he was leaving, baby girl was born. So that's -- [one line redacted – personal information], and all that stuff. And then -- and then he came kept on working on the mines back and forth, and met another nice woman I guess they stayed together. But then there again too, as in, I guess it didn't work out, and as he was leaving there too, he left and then another -- another little baby girl was born, so [one line redacted – personal information], and getting terrible -- not very nice phone calls because when he works, he makes a lot of money being an electrician, so there's all kinds of different things going on, I guess. So yeah, his when -- towards the end, when his brother had a terrible time with a relationship also, when his brother ran away to Yellowknife for six,
seven years and then his brother was coming home,
Delmer was home. His brother was coming home. Holy man,
everybody was happy. It didn't pan out. They had total
different -- it didn't work out so he wanted to do so
much with his little brother, go hunting and finishing.
Doing different stuff that just didn't pan out. I think
that also hurt him too. So all kinds of different stuff
like that in a nutshell. Like, his brother, and all of
his friends I guess miss him terribly, and even about an
hour ago, I was saying that when I mentioned Delmer's
name to my wife on the phone, I started crying and,
yeah, I guess the big thing now is trying to put some
closure, you know, if that's the way it's meant to be,
then at least some acceptance and gosh emotionally, I
know my family, myself, my wife and the rest of the
family, terribly need some emotional support because
yeah, if we don't begin to deal with it emotionally,
properly then -- then people, we may suffer, we don't
need to suffer, that kind of stuff, that I worry about
too, and I guess the main big animal -- elephant in the
room with this inquiry, and the healing that needs to
really begin is relationships and sexuality and boys and
girls and men and women, you know, it has been hidden
for too long and the -- the laws in Canada are not, not
really forthcoming too. And obviously we -- we need to
1 develop various different things in our communities
2 because right now we're full-blown denial for anything -
3 - anything that's health -- healthy thing.
4 So still to make headway to contribute
5 to our community, our people, just too much, still too
6 much -- too much hurting going on and we -- I hope by me
7 talking here we -- at least begin to break that cycle,
8 you know, and for sure my other son and Delmer's
9 sister's also need to -- so that the -- this hurting
10 will stop. Yeah, I really pray because I -- I love my
11 wife dearly and my children, I always did, even though I
12 may not have been there for them all the time but I love
13 them dearly and want to be the best father that I could
14 be and now I'm a grandpa. I want -- I want to be -- I
15 want to be the best I could be for them, yeah, and I
16 guess I needed to finish off that way sharing that.
17 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay.
18 MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah.
19 MR. FRANK HOPE: So just a couple of
20 questions, so at the time that Delmer was reported
21 missing, what -- how long was it before he was reported
22 missing and he was living -- he was living with you guys
23 --
24 MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, he had
25 just come home, but dropped off his clothes and he was
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Joachim Bonnetrouge
(Delmer Bonnetrouge)

1 working in Yellowknife, Hay River, back and forth.
2
3 with his work?
4
5 MR. FRANK HOPE: So he was transient
6
7 MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah.
8
9 MR. FRANK HOPE: But home base was your
10 place?
11
12 MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, drops
13 off his clothes there.
14
15 MR. FRANK HOPE: So he was -- he would
16 go to Yellowknife, he would go to Hay River, and he
17 would work at these sites for days and then come back?
18
19 MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, yeah.
20
21 MR. FRANK HOPE: And go to another job?
22
23 MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah.
24
25 MR. FRANK HOPE: So how long in between
26 was he reported missing before you actually reported
27 him?
28
29 MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Actually,
30 according to his mom, his mom was at home, and I was
31 travelling. I think maybe too, maybe three days before
32 she noticed. Usually he comes in, pops in, checks on
33 his mom, or checks on the house, and three days and all
34 of a sudden, he was just not there anymore.
35
36 MR. FRANK HOPE: Right. And then who
37 reported him?
MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Officially I did.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. You reported him to the RCMP?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yes, yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. And from the time that you reported him to the RCMP, what was their involvement. How did they respond in regards to your actual report?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: They said -- well, they received my phone call, and they said they'll have somebody look into it.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Mhmm.

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: And then four hours later, I think there was two investigators, plain clothes came to my house. Right away, I felt like I was number 1 suspect. They interrogated me.

MR. FRANK HOPE: From Yellowknife?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, from Yellowknife, yeah, yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: And how long did that process happen? How long was that interview taking place?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: The interview took about three hours, yeah. Just outside on a picnic
MR. FRANK HOPE: So what made you feel that they were interrogating you? You felt like a suspect?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, I felt like a suspect. It's a good thing my daughter was there, I guess, to correct and -- because they asked some pretty pointed questions, yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: And then how did it end?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: I -- you know, just the way I am, I -- I had nothing to hide, you know, so -- but I felt like I was interrogated, yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah. Yeah, because there's always process, you know, when someone is missing, you know. A woman, a girl, a man, a boy.

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Right? There's always -- the RCMP or city police if it's in Saskatoon, Vancouver, whatever, they all have their different types of response. You know, they all respond differently.

So I guess that's what we're looking at is looking at those themes and those systemic issues of -- you know,
if it's an issue of, you know, race, is there racism?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, there was a bit of that. At that time too, during that time, we should have, I think the band should have. There was a lot of muscle being put on by two RCMP members. Just during that -- during that whole time.

MR. FRANK HOPE: From the community or from out?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: They were there, but they were beating up a lot of younger guys. A lot of intimidation by the RCMP -- those two RCMP. In retrospect, I did mention it to the G Division commander. At that time, we should have laid a complaint. They beat up four -- four of our young men very unnecessarily just maybe just to intimidation -- so that was going on too. My suspicion is maybe because Delmer was young guy, good looking, doing well, maybe they didn't like that I sometimes think. I know it's kind of -- yeah, I still believe that trumped up charges, and they are the ones that probably wrote it up. Yeah, so -- yeah, so that that's probably a good possibility so that's what I asked the RCMP to review the file but I guess they don't want to, I guess, yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: So Delmer is missing, so in regards to the justice system, all those, the
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Joachim Bonnetrouge
(Delmer Bonnetrouge)

charges that he -- you said there's three of them, three
charges?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Three, yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: So do you know if
those charges stand while he's missing, like, how does
that work; do you know?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Say that
again?

MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah. Do those -- the
charges that he's -- you said he missed two court dates.

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: He missed two court
dates to appear for the three charges. So as long as
he's missing, those charges stand?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, still
stand, yeah, yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: So they stand, hey?

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, yeah.

And I've learned also if he keeps on being missing after
seven years, they can declare him dead, yeah. After
seven years, you might know a little bit about that too.
And then statute of limitations also say that after 20
years, those charges will drop. Yeah. It will be more
charges, and then Delmer will be 58 years old, he'll
come home. But myself, I don't know about his mom, but
my wish is that he would -- he would come home and
answer to the charges, a lot of his aunts -- aunties are
saying he'll support him and maybe -- maybe raise money
for law to, get him good defence and get those charges
thrown out. Sometimes I wish that it would happen and
of course it will be all to enter the process and deal
with it and there's healing involved because I believe
the truth will always set you free. The truth will set
you free. I have learned that, and I believe -- I
believe in that. Yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Yes, so as you know,
this national inquiry is looking into those systemic
issues in regards to the missing and murdered women and
girls, and you know, a lot of those systemic issues are
-- like, some of the themes we're looking at is -- some
of them are, you know, unsolved, some of them -- some of
the women are survivors. Survivors of domestic
violence. Survivors of -- that have been left to die
and survived, that have been involved with being raped,
being held captive, you know, all of these horrendous
things that have happened to them, and the police
involvement, how the police have been involved in that
process, we're looking at sexual exploitation and abuse.
There is child welfare involvement. There is foster
care involvement. Adoption, addiction, healing,
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Joachim Bonnetrouge
(Delmer Bonnetrouge)

1. culture, ceremony, resiliency, systemic racism,
2. barriers, and certainly a lot of -- a lot of causes are
3. from men. A lot of it is comes from men that have been
4. reported in the process. So we're listening to stories
5. of husbands and common law and partners that have been
6. involved with a lot of these issues.

   MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yes.

   MR. FRANK HOPE: So what would be your
7. message in regards to that or recommendation in regards
8. to your own story?

   MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Yeah, I
9. guess, it -- it's so basic how many generations of
10. families have been -- families have been torn apart.
11. Dislocated. Holy man, a lot of recovery even to trace
12. back to your mom and dad or grandpa, even to begin that
13. conversation, I think right now is critical to, yeah,
14. I've got a lot of respect for this inquiry because even
15. that whole notion of giving us our voice back, and more
16. so giving voice back to women because I guess the big
17. societies, it's men domineering. Women finally
18. beginning to -- and I get excited sometimes too because
19. in -- for a while in our community, the women were the
20. movers and shakers, and I guess they were doing their
21. own healing. But men, those on the perimeter, nothing
22. happening for the men. And like you say, men were

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generally perpetrators so that's got to be worked out, I guess. Yeah, even -- even the whole -- in the community -- in the community, if there's domestic violence, what happens is the women and the children are removed. And the man stays in the house. Even simple things like that has -- that's got to change. You have to reverse that. The woman should never ever have to leave her home with the children. So even simple thing like that, I -- it was pointed out to me is that usually the -- that's the worst thing you can do to the family is the guy stays at home, he has done the domestic violence thing. The woman, the mother black and blue with the children, they're sent away. That's a total no no, even we can get that number 1 in our community. And we need to say any abuse against girls or women zero tolerance, period. And just maybe make a sign, the buck stops here kind of thing, and that ownership. And it's always a catch 22 because it's through the all the drinking and all the drugging, on the weekends, holy man, we're enabling. But even if you wrote out, stop, stop, no more abuse against girls and women in our community, and I would be one of the first ones to sign mine name. Take ownership. Just a simple thing like that. We need to start that, yesterday started today, you know. Yeah, it's -- I can probably go on for another half hour to an
hour, but we just need simple little steps, like, what I just suggested. That abuse has to stop and the healing has to begin, and what is happening here is giving voice. Giving the women, young girls their voice back there is abuse happening in your life, do something about it. Yeah. And god knows we need training, we need caretakers, we need counsellor, we need therapists, gosh. Gosh, there is nothing in the communities. Thirty years ago, we had AA, we had sharing circles and all of a sudden, I don't know, the funding dried up or people -- the people that were at the forefront, maybe we burned them out. Maybe the second generation is not coming up, we don't have any counsellors, we need therapists, support groups, you know. Boy, if you're trying to be sober nowadays in any community, in my community we wish you luck. There's no support. If somebody is going to live a sober lifestyle, there's no support anywhere. Yeah. Maybe the mom and dad are just hanging on to each other the rest of the children may be this. All kinds of different things might be happening, but just hanging on for dear life. Yeah. Yeah, it's, we need support systems for families, just basic. To simmer things down a bit. Holy man, just -- I guess our community is not the only one, I travel, see what's going on. Drugs we're supposed to prepare, but holy
man. Alcohol, we -- I think we have learned to manage it, but drugs that are coming in now, holy man, it's dangerous stuff, and a lot of our young people have gone there already, so yeah.

MR. FRANK HOPE: So kah (ph).

MR. JOACHIM BONNETROUGE: Kah mahsi.

MR. FRANK HOPE: Mahsi, thank you for that. That concludes our interview with Joachim today, and the time is 5:07.

--- Whereupon the statement concluded at 5:07 p.m.
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I have, to the best
of my skill and ability,
accurately transcribed from a pre-existing recording
the foregoing proceeding.

Stephanie Menard, CSR(A)