National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Truth-Gathering Process

Part 1 Statement Gathering

Chateau Nova Hotel

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

PUBLIC

Thursday January 25, 2018

Statement - Volume 216

Bernard Michel,

In relation to Yvonne Desjarlais

Statement gathered by Kerrie Reay

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NOTE 1:

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NOTE 2:

The use of square brackets [ ] in this transcript indicates that amendments have been made to the certified transcript in order to replace information deemed inaudible or indecipherable by the original transcriptionist. Amendments were completed by listening to the source audio recording of the proceeding and were made by Maryiam Khoury, Public Inquiry Clerk with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQ, July 31st 2018 at Ottawa, Ontario.
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Statement - Public
Bernard Michel
(Yvonne Desjarlais)

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
--- Upon commencing on Thursday, January 25, 2018
at 1:11 p.m.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Bernard, you are ready to start?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. So for the record, this is Kerrie Reay, statement taker with the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Today we are in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, on January the 25, 2018.

And with me today is Bernard Michel who will be speaking about the loss of his mother, Yvonne Desjarlais. Ms. Desjarlais was murdered in Yellowknife on December the 28, 2012. And in the room with us is Bruce Handley, H-a-n-d-l-e-y, as health support. And Bernard, you are here --

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: What is the date you said?

MS. KERRIE REAY: I said January the 25.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Twenty-eight?

MS. KERRIE REAY: No. Today is the 25.


MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. So that is
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1 correct?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: That's correct.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Good. That is
great to check. That is good. So Bernard, you have agreed
only to be on audio tape, and that is fine. We appreciate
you making that choice. So the Commissioners will listen
to the audio tape. And you have also acknowledged today
that you are here voluntarily and that your statement can
be public.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Bernard, I know
this will be difficult, but go ahead and start where you
feel comfortable with your truth, today.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Well, first, I heard
-- I was in Dettah (ph) with my friend, and my friend took
off to (indiscernible) [Yellowknife]. Early in the
morning, he phoned me and told me to phone his mom. He
said his mom wants me to do her a favour, so I phoned her.
His mom told me the story. Told me, "Your mom is gone."
It's early morning. I listened to nothing, so I just sat
back down. Just sat back down and tried not to say
anything about it.

And then the person who was in his house
(indiscernible). And I stay there once in a while. He
didn't want to tell me anything, so he told me to call his
mom. He wants me to phone his mom. So more phone calls.
People knew I was there. And I stayed there for a while
longer this time. People keep on bothering the door. I
just ignore them. I never bothered phoning anybody. I
tried to hold back.
So finally I got tired, so I walk on the
highway to an ice road. I walked so far, and I caught a
ride. I went to a shopping centre. Just walking around.
People just stared at me, and say that -- so I go see my
brother. Just walking down, I ran into a few people. Just
saying hi and everything. Some parts I hardly remember
because it is kind of confusing and everything. I ran into
a few people, and I ran -- I was walking with my friends.
We see my brother, my oldest brother. He was traveling
around with his wife.

MS. KERRIE REAY: What is his name?
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: [Brother 1].
MS. KERRIE REAY: [Brother 1].
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: He's the oldest one.
He stopped, and he gave me a hug. I didn't know what to
say to him.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Would you like some
tobacco to hold?
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: He gave me a hug. He
started crying when I told him what was going on. I said,
"You wouldn't believe it." We went to my brother's house. His name is [Brother 2]. My sister was there, [Sister 1]. And my nephew, [Nephew 1] was there. They're all sitting around. [Brother 2]'s family was there. I sat around there for a while, and I don't know what happened. I took off. I didn't want to be around anybody. I was walking around. I must have had high blood pressure. My nose started bleeding. I had a garbage pail that I filled up full of blood. So I end up in the hospital. They were taking her body back to Lutsel-k'e, and I lost the first flight because I couldn't make it. I was in the hospital.

The last plane for the burial -- I went back and made it in time there. That was in January. That was in (indiscernible) [the community hall]. I never looked at anyone. I went straight to my seat where my brothers and sisters were. I sat beside them. I sat there. There was my mom in a casket. I thought she was sleeping. I sat and just stared at it. We went to the burial ground, into (indiscernible) [Yellowknife] river. They drove us all out there, put her to rest. My nephew said something, and I wasn't paying attention. I was kind of in shock and everything. She wasn't only murdered. She was raped too. I stayed there a few weeks after that. [Back to
Yellowknife], I just started drinking again. Ever since I was delayed, it's been five years now.

I've been getting involved with the law and everything. I don't want to go home because there is nothing there for me. There is nothing there for me. There is too much memories [and pain]. My late mom was a nice person. She would let anybody in the house. She would feed anybody. She liked to joke around.

[The reason why I came out], I want to talk about me because I've been getting into fights with my brothers and sisters lately, getting involved with the law. I don't do drugs. Just alcohol. And whoever I talk to, I don't care if my mom visited them. I can just buy a temporary pass [I could lose my temper fast]. I don't talk about -- I hated Eskimos because it was an Eskimo person that murdered my mom.

(Indiscernible) [I was in a] day shelter. I am day drinking. (Indiscernible) [Just drink and party with anybody]. I just go in there and [freak out, flip out and] flip over tables. I don't know how many times I did that over the years. And one day I must have overdid it. So I got [kicked out and] charged for that. I guess I was [doing bodily threats] (indiscernible). So I get charged for [bodily threats], assault and everything. I'm losing my brothers and sisters, so that is the reason why I'm
here. I want to talk because I don't want to lose them.  

Right now it is hard to control my temper.  

I went to Poundmaker's. It didn't work. The reason why it didn't work was because they are accepting people from the street, people who doesn't work, junkies. People on the street, that is all they do. Popping pills and everything.  

(Indiscernible) [Just want a place to stay --] they go for ceremonies. They just laugh. They are not serious.  

I talked to my counselor. I'm like,  

"I don't belong here." So they shipped me back here. I didn't want to deal with it. I even get mad at my parole officer. I just lose my temper. I get mad at somebody when they -- I get mad the whole day.  

MS. KERRIE REAY: Do you find being mad has been more since your mom passed away? Or is that something you felt before?  

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Never was before.  

MS. KERRIE REAY: That's part --  

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: A lot of hatred.  

MS. KERRIE REAY: But grief is very difficult. And part of grief is anger, as well, you know.  

The hope of -- when you said that you still hoped to see your mom walking, and so there is still a lot there that needs to be supported for you for help. Because the anger, from what you said, is starting to get you in trouble with
the law.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: The thing is that I am apologizing to people, to whoever I said something. A few of them I said I'm sorry. But it comes back again. The same person.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Yes. But when we were talking yesterday, you are very closed. You do not want -- it felt like you did not want to share. And I think it took a phenomenal amount of courage to come back here today to talk about your mom and your loss and the anger you feel. Because it is talking that helps us cope better day-to-day. And you have said that you are starting to lose your relationships with your brothers and sisters; right?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So being in different places --

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: People are close to me, too. I am losing relationships with them.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Are you losing them because you are pushing them away --

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Anger. And I am pushing them away. I have just been stubborn.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And how do you feel when you are pushing the family away?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: It doesn't bother me.
I want to be alone. There is no caring in the world.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And grief is different for everybody; right? How you feel and how your brother feels and how your sister feels may all be different.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: They smoke, they do drugs, there is a difference between alcohol and drugs. [so I don’t know] so I don't bother. Just cope with myself.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And so are you living here in Yellowknife now?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And where do you live in Yellowknife?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Live anywhere.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I'm most of the time in Salvation Army.

MS. KERRIE REAY: You also were talking about having a tough time with alcohol?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: How are you doing right now?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Some days, like, meetings [going] doing down. I just listen and stay away from people uptown. I just hang around and cope with myself just to get some ideas. This is pretty interesting.
That is the reason why I am talking to you guys. It gives me a lot of courage.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Right. Yes.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because I lost touch.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And you are not alone.

You are not alone. Many people you have seen and heard over the last couple of days are struggling in the same way you are. It kind of makes you feel like you are not alone.

There are other people the same.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: It's not the easiest thing to get rid of.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So would you like to share what it was like growing up and what community -- can you spell the name of the community that you are from.


MS. KERRIE REAY: And whereabouts is that?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: East arm of the Great Slave Lake.

MS. KERRIE REAY: East?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: East arm.

MS. KERRIE REAY: East arm of the Great Slave Lake.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And which nation are you
Bernard Michel
(Yvonne Desjarlais)

1 with -- from?
2 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Akaitcho (ph).
3 MS. KERRIE REAY: And how do you spell
4 that?
5 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I don't know. It's
6 Akaitcho. I don't know.
7 MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. But the Dene (ph)
8 First Nation?
9 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. Dene First
10 Nation.
11 MS. KERRIE REAY: Do you speak your
12 language?
13 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. I understand a
14 little bit (indiscernible) Slavey (ph).
15 MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Would you like to
16 share with the Commissioners what it was like growing up?
17 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Well, actually, I
18 wasn't really raised by my parents. My stepfather. I
19 never really knew my real dad. So I was mostly raised by
20 my grandfather.
21 MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.
22 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: So it was actually
23 like I was raised like an orphan. Going back and forth,
24 helping myself from elders to elders in the community.
25 MS. KERRIE REAY: And where was your mom?
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MR. BERNARD MICHEL: In town.

MS. KERRIE REAY: When you say "town," in Yellowknife?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Lutsel-ke'.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Ever since I have known my stepfather, I was being drinking, making the home brew.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Do you know if your mom went to residential school?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. I never did ask her anything about it. She would never talk about it.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Did you hear anything about what happened there from others? From your grandpa?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Not really because -- I don't know how to say it. They would only talk when they're drinking. I don't really acknowledge or listen to them.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Most of the time I was [raised] by myself. Even though I helped them raise my brothers [brothers] and sisters as we were growing up, going back and forth.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Right.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Most of the community
while I was growing up, there is a lot of (indiscernible) [drinking] out there.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Sometimes -- most of the time we had our own activities. So whenever there were activities, I would always help them run. That is how I was getting around, knew my way around. A few times -- not a few times. So many times we were out in the land with my stepfather and my grandfather. So I got to know my way around that area and around the Great Slave Lake. There were friends around. We got to travel and go hunting.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Good memories.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: [We did a lot of things together]. There was lots of land, what is good to burn. All the woods are good to burn.

MS. KERRIE REAY: It sounds like those are good memories for you when you were younger.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. Good memories, but you know. Like, I had Ski-Doo. I had a boat. It is on the islands, so my uncle took my boat. So I just let him have it. My Ski-Doo was there. I don't know what happened to it. I didn't even bother. And today I don't have anything.

MS. KERRIE REAY: It is hard.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I've got my daughter,
four grandkids. My grandkids don't even know me, because I never raised my daughter.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Can I ask who raised your daughter?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Her mom.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. And where is her mom?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Her mom is married. It was a mistake. I was fooling around with a married woman. And I am not mentioning her name.

MS. KERRIE REAY: No, no, no. Is your daughter in Yellowknife?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No. Lutsel-ke'.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Does she know, though, that you are her dad?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. [We talk].

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. And when you are with her, do you feel good? Sad?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I feel like a stranger. Like I shouldn't be around.

MS. KERRIE REAY: How old is she?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: She's about 30, 31.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Do you spend -- do you go back and forth between Yellowknife and your community, or are you mostly here?
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Not for the longest time. [Like I told you], for me, there is nothing there for me.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So did most of your family, then, move into Yellowknife?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Most of them are in town here. Just uncles, aunts are mostly back home.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. But your brothers and sisters are here in Yellowknife?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And how are they doing with the loss of your mom? Do you know?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I don't really associate with them.

MS. KERRIE REAY: That is what you were saying; right?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: What?

MS. KERRIE REAY: I said that is what you were saying earlier.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. I'm fading away from them.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And why do you think that?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because I am being stubborn. I am not communicating with them, or they are
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1 not communicating with me. I don't know. Just being
2 stubborn. We are not sharing.

3 MS. KERRIE REAY: Right. Those things are
4 hard when people are in pain. You know, it is a heavy
5 burden. That happens for lots of families. Sometimes
6 somebody makes the first move. You try, but it is hard.
7
8 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes, it is.
9
10 MS. KERRIE REAY: So what other things did
11 you enjoy growing up?
12
13 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Mostly living on the
15 bothers you. You have freedom. I went hunting, trapping.
16 Living in cities is like something new to me. I never used
17 to do that. I can't blame nobody. I blame myself.
18
19 MS. KERRIE REAY: Sometimes things happen
20 in life that sometimes take us down a different path. And
21 the challenge is, how do we get back on the path? It
22 sounds like you are trying. It sounds like you are working
23 at trying with staying at the Salvation Army because they
24 don't allow you there if you have been drinking, do they?
25
26 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: They allow you there
27 when you are drinking. Most of the time you can't hardly
28 sleep because [too much] people argue, swearing, fighting
29 in the middle of the night. And sometimes the staff, they
30 don't care. They are just there for the money too.
(Indiscernible) [Same thing everywhere too]. I don't deal with them. Whatever we talk about, they laugh at people. I overhear people talk about (indiscernible) [going to meetings and stuff like that and they] talk about something, and they just joke about it. I heard that a few times. I wasn't eavesdropping. I just happened to hear it.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Right, right.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Therefore, I don't hardly go to the classes and stuff like that. I turn on my probation officer. I swear at her. Sometimes words just come out. I don't apologize.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So is this the first time you have had a probation officer?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No. I don't like following the rules.

MS. KERRIE REAY: It is a different world than being out on the land, isn't it?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: When you were at home, did you go to school there?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. I went to school. It's called Tortor School (ph). I went to Grade 10. That's it. I didn't bother after that.
attend residential school?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Did your older brother?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: What?

MS. KERRIE REAY: Did your older brother?

Your older brother, did he go?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: None of us did.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Good.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I was about ten, ten years old. I was staying with my parents back then. [Been drinking too much for] Not too long, and one day Social Services picked us up and took us to [Location 1]. We spent a whole year there. Social Services must have come [to Lutsel-ke'] and talked to them. We were out there for six months or a year or so. They took us out back. So I stayed in school [in Location 1] for a while there.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And how did you do in [Location 1]?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I would say pretty good.

MS. KERRIE REAY: How were the foster parents?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I was in a group home.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Oh, you were in a group
Statement - Public
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1 home?
2
3 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. [One line
4 redacted - personal information].
5
6 MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay.
7
8 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: And all the rest of
9 us were in a group home.
10
11 MS. KERRIE REAY: So they kept you and
12 your brothers together?
13
14 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. My sisters and
15 brothers. My [sibling] was in a different place.
16
17 MS. KERRIE REAY: How did you find the
18 group home?
19
20 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: The group home was up
21 and down. I was watching my brothers and sisters.
22
23 MS. KERRIE REAY: Did you feel safe in the
24 group home?
25
26 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No.
27
28 MS. KERRIE REAY: Can I ask what made you
29 feel not safe?
30
31 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because some
32 supervisors were picking on my brothers and sisters.
33
34 MS. KERRIE REAY: Picking on them?
35
36 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. Picking on
37 them.
38
39 MS. KERRIE REAY: What do you mean by
"picking on them"?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because they liked to play, around and the supervisors yell at them, put them in their room, ground them.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So pretty strict?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. A few times I saw them hit my brothers. I got freaked out. Somehow I jumped on a table and kicked her head. So I got thrown in my room for a long time there.

MS. KERRIE REAY: It is pretty hard for young children to be taken from their family.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Most of the time I wasn't raised with them, but I still protect them, though.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Right, right. But you were in the same community? From what you were saying earlier, you may not have been in the same home, but you saw your brothers and sisters in the streets, playing?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Back home (indiscernible) [is where I rather be]. Out there is different.

MS. KERRIE REAY: When you were back home, did you feel safe there?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. Because I knew everybody, and everybody knew me. I would stay with my grandfather or go sleep at a friend's.
MS. KERRIE REAY: When you were in the group home, you went to school in [Location 1], as well. And there was physical violence. Was there any other kind of violence towards your family members or yourself?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: They went to visit us in [Location 1]. They would go to an old town. It's called Old Town. They must have moved some friends out there. They would go drink with them. Just forget about us. They would see us when they are sober.

Drinking was a big issue in our family when we were growing up. That is all we knew. Everybody, alcohol in small communities. That's all they know. Because the whole community drank a lot. And the younger generation drinks.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Sometimes, though, with that kind of drinking comes some forms of violence, too. Did you see much violence? Did you see any violence?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I have seen lots.

MS. KERRIE REAY: What kind of violence did you see as a child?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I have seen a lot of physical torture -- like, hitting with a bat. I have seen a big barrel for the garbage bin, to throw garbage in there, flying through the door or window of the living room window. And somebody shooting in a house. Top of the hill
is quite a ways. Someone was firing a rifle from the top onto my late grandfather's house.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Pretty scary.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. It is a good thing [everybody was still sleeping], nobody got hit.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Right.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: And we know who that is. The person got away with it.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And so was there policing in your community? Or did they fly in or drive in?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Most of the time -- like, I don't know. Most of the time, cops are out there. There are two cops [over there].

MS. KERRIE REAY: They live in the community?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. Sometimes they don't even bother going around. Driving around when it's daytime. Just when I was growing up, [other than that], I didn't hardly [remember]--

MS. KERRIE REAY: So when you are talking about being younger, do you remember when you first tried alcohol?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: When I was 22.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Twenty-two.
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I was forced when it was my 15th birthday.

MS. KERRIE REAY: You were forced by who?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: First birthday at 15 years, my late uncle [P.] forced me to drink. And that was the last time I drank until I was 22. From there, off and on, off and on until today.

MS. KERRIE REAY: How did your uncle force you to drink?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Well, he's bigger than I am. [Him and his friend] He was sitting beside, like, how we are sitting right now. He wouldn't let me get up out of the chair. He told me, "You're not going nowhere until you drink." And my grandfather was there. He didn't mind. He was drinking, too, with him. So they forced me there. I had no choice.

MS. KERRIE REAY: But you made a choice because you did not drink after.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: What's that?

MS. KERRIE REAY: I said, you made a choice because you did not drink after. So that was a good choice.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because I had seen lots of what was going on, so I didn't want to drink most of my life. Ever since my mom passed away, I am not caring
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1 [anymore].
2 MS. KERRIE REAY: Well, people use
drinking to dull the pain, to try to make the pain go away.
3 It really makes you just not feel well.
4 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: It is a lot easier to
get around, too.
5 MS. KERRIE REAY: A lot easier to get
around?
6 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.
7 MS. KERRIE REAY: When you are drinking or
when you are not drinking?
8 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Drinking.
9 MS. KERRIE REAY: How does that work?
10 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because you are a
little bit braver. You can talk to anybody. You can score
your next shot or borrow some money.
11 MS. KERRIE REAY: Do you feel you are a
quiet person?
12 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Not really. I was
the kind of person that communicates. I don't know.
13 Sometimes I don't say nothing. My excuse is that I'm hard
of hearing.
14 MS. KERRIE REAY: Are you?
15 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: That's the reason why
sometimes I just keep quiet. I see their mouth moving, and

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sometimes I can't hear, so I don't say nothing.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So how old are you now?

Can I ask?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Right now I'm 49.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Forty-nine. Fifty is around the corner for you.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Around the corner.

MS. KERRIE REAY: When will you be 50?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: In September.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. This year coming up?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. I'm not getting any younger anymore, so --

MS. KERRIE REAY: Yes. None of us are.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: [No]. So I want to work on myself. I want to get to know my grandkids. I want my grandkids to get to know me. That is what my goal is.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Right. And that goal needs to have a healthy Bernard; right?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: You need to be healthy.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: And they never see me drinking.

MS. KERRIE REAY: They have never seen you
drinking? So you said you started drinking at 22. What happened at 22? Why then?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I must have hit the wrong crowd.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Was that here? Were you in Yellowknife then?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Lutsel-ke'.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Still at home?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: How many people lived there, do you think?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Right now?

MS. KERRIE REAY: Yes.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I think it is about 800.

MS. KERRIE REAY: About 800. So still, that is a pretty big community.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Back then it was about seven.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Is this formerly known as Snowdrift?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Is there much industry?

Any kind of economic --

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Today is just that
they have a gym. They have an arena. (Indiscernible)
[that’s all they have and a] baseball diamond. I'm not too sure. I haven't been back home for a while. There is a recreation coordinator that coordinates everything there.

MS. KERRIE REAY: What do people do for employment?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: They go to the band office and whatever is listed and contract comes to town or whatever needs to be done.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So sort of small jobs. And band office jobs.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: First come, first serve. Seasonal jobs too, like, (indiscernible) [There’s a frontier] fishing lodge. It is about a mile away from Lutsel-ke'. Or half a mile.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So not really a lot of opportunity to find employment in your community?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Most of the time they are selling drugs and booze. Sometimes they sell fish.

MS. KERRIE REAY: How long have you been back in Yellowknife, now?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I don't know. Eight years.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Eight years? Has it been difficult to find work?
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No. It is just me.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Just you?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because I am not trying hard enough.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Can you describe how it feels when you think you should, maybe, go and get a job, and then you say to yourself, "Not now"?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I did have a job. I wasn't really working on myself because I don't have a roof over my head. And it was taking a while to get a roof. So that is part of my main issue [and problem].

MS. KERRIE REAY: And still angry. That is what you said; right? I do not want to put words in your mouth. You were talking about the anger that you still feel, the frustration. So you mentioned that you were on probation. How long does that go for?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I'm still on probation. So maybe another year. I was told by my probation officer, if you -- says they are going to charge me. I said, "Go right ahead."

MS. KERRIE REAY: Do you see your probation officer as somebody that might be able to help?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: What is that supposed to mean?

MS. KERRIE REAY: Well, help you find a
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path to wellness. To help you do more than just have a
check-in to see how you are doing, but rather, to encourage
you, help you get into counseling somewhere that works for
you.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. They are trying
to put me in counseling, which I don't need counseling. So
that is the reason why I shut them right down.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And can I ask why you do
not think you need counseling?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because before I went
to treatment, I was taking counseling. And I go to
treatment, and all the counselors were (indiscernible) me
and stuff like that.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So it did not work for
you?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: [No]. It was so long
ago, the counseling.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Part of coming here and
talking about aftercare, if there was a way to help support
you to get into counseling, do you think that would be
something you could think about doing?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Does it have
something to do with aftercare?

MS. KERRIE REAY: Well, because today, you
say you want your journey to be healthier. You are 49.
You are turning 50. And you want to have a relationship with your grandchildren and your daughter. So to do that, to be healthy, sometimes it is very difficult to do it on our own. You are also talking, today, about the hurt and the anger that you are still coping with, with the loss of your mom. And that is a pretty heavy burden to try to do on your own.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I've just been stubborn, I guess.

MS. KERRIE REAY: You know, and that is a decision. For you, those were some things to think about. It is very hard to do it on our own, but also, it is important to have the right person. And trust is a big thing when you are talking about counseling.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. That is the thing. It is hard to trust people around a small area like this.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Yes. I understand, totally.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: You can be having coffee in a restaurant and overhear people talking about -- somebody is talking about what they said in AA and stuff like that, a program. And I didn't have to turn around.

MS. KERRIE REAY: You knew.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No, I didn't know. I
don't want to turn around, and I don't want to know who
said. So part of the reason why I don't trust going to
these people is because they are just there for the money.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Well [some people --],
sometimes it takes a leap of faith to trust somebody. And
I think you did that coming back to speak to me today.
Because when we talked about it yesterday, you were pretty
sure you did not want to talk about it. But here you are
today, because you took a leap of faith to trust.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because I want to let
it out.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Yes.
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because of the others
I was listening to, it gave me a lot of courage.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And certainly, have
courage to come and talk about it. Absolutely. But it
took a leap of faith.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: It did.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Yes.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I wasn't too sure. I
was thinking, "Should I do it, or not," [that's what I was
thinking] when I first sat down.

MS. KERRIE REAY: It is scary.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No. It's just hurt
feelings. That's what it is.
MS. KERRIE REAY: But you did. And that is a pretty big step to start talking because when we start to talk like this, we start to feel a bit vulnerable. We want to protect ourselves. We do not want to hurt anymore. But often, talking is what helps us feel better. That burden starts to lift, maybe just even a little bit. Does your probation officer know about the passing of your mom?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Can you repeat that again?

MS. KERRIE REAY: Sorry. Does your probation officer know about the violent death of your mom?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I don't know because I was never asked. So I'm not too sure.

MS. KERRIE REAY: If I can just come back a little bit, you said that they know who took your mom's life?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Did they go through the court process?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Were they found guilty?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: They were found guilty.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. And do you know what the sentence was?
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Twenty-five years.

He has to do 10 years before he gets parole.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Ten years before he can apply for parole?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Were you involved in talking with the police at all, or did you watch from afar what was happening?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: What do you mean by that?

MS. KERRIE REAY: So did the police talk to you at all? Did they interview you? Did they talk to you about your mom?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I'm pretty sure they did. I'm not too sure, though. I was pretty intoxicated most of the time, so I had time to listen to no one.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Can you share with the Commissioners what your life has been like since your mom was so violently taken from you? Because you talked about it --

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: It is like I'm going downhill. It is like I'm losing all my touch. I'm not even myself. I don't want to live. I want to have a reason to do anything. I don't know. I feel kind of lost.

That's how I feel.
MS. KERRIE REAY: It is hard.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I'm too much in a mind space [on my mind]. It's hard to say right now. It's up and down.

MS. KERRIE REAY: When you say you have too much on your mind, what sort of things are on your mind?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: (Indiscernible) [Instead of a good way, I think negative]. So most of the time, that is the reason why I help out my elders. Once in a while I go to recuperate. Just, like, living on the land and helping around on his place, her place.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So those moments make you feel good?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Good.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: It reminds me of my grandmother, too.

MS. KERRIE REAY: That is lovely.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I don't know.

Whatever keeps me busy. That is all I need. I just don't know.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And it is hard when you do that self talk to yourself because you are only talking to yourself; right? Sometimes when you can share with
somebody else -- what we talked about, you know, having trust.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: You talk to somebody and you tell them a story or whatever to some people. You tell them the truth, and they don't believe you. You tell them lies, and they believe you. So it is, like, what is the point of telling your stories?

MS. KERRIE REAY: But you said, "not wanting to live" and "what is the point." You also said you had grandchildren.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes. But it would be different if I was seeing them all the time.

MS. KERRIE REAY: A little jumbled.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: [Yeah]. Most of the time I'm not too sure what I should do today and this and that. I don't hardly make plans. I just go with the flow. But this was a plan. Thanks for asking, though.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So what has been your experience this last couple of days being here at the inquiry and listening to the stories?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: It is a lot of touchy feeling. I had a few tears, listening to them. It is making me want to say something and whether I should talk or not. I thought my uncle was going to say more yesterday. I had some ideas, but I wasn't too sure.
MS. KERRIE REAY: How do you feel --
because you sat here with your uncle. When we finished,
how were you feeling?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I felt all right
because it's over. I thought he was going to say more
about my late mom.

MS. KERRIE REAY: What were you expecting
him to say, or what were you hoping for him to say?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: How she was gone and
everything. Explain how she was gone. (Indiscernible)
[That's about it]. But I'm proud of him, you know.

MS. KERRIE REAY: It took a lot of
courage.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Yes.

MS. KERRIE REAY: What other things are
you seeing here that gives you something to think about?
What about the cultural -- people smudging and partaking in
a lot of the culture that is happening here?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: To be honest, I was
never taught about stuff like that, so it doesn't bother
me. I go to a lot of sweats and things just to sweat. Not
for medicine and stuff like that. Even though I don't like
-- I don't smoke, but I love to light, to smell this. But
I just do it. It is not my prayer. (Indiscernible) [I
just go with it anyways, a prayer is a prayer]. That is how
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1 I say.

   MS. KERRIE REAY: Watching, did you see
2 people who were smudging and the healing? Were you able to
3 see how people who were telling their truths -- sharing
4 their truths -- that burden was lifting? Did you see any
5 of that?
6
   MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No.

7 MS. KERRIE REAY: No?

8 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: But I see a lot of
9 people smudge, though. Stuff like that. It never came
10 across me, though, even though I tried that and everything.

11 MS. KERRIE REAY: And that is okay. As
12 you say, a prayer is a prayer. People do what it will to
13 help them.

15 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: They make their own
16 choices. Whatever they believe. There is nothing I can
17 say to them.

18 MS. KERRIE REAY: But in terms of your own
19 healing, have you given thought to what you would like to
20 see happen for yourself? That self talk that you were
21 talking about, being positive. What sort of positive
22 things are you thinking about doing for yourself?

23 MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I want to get back on
24 my feet.

25 MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. And what do you
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think that will take to do?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I want to start working on myself. Talking to people. I got to learn how to respect people. I will work on my attitude, my behaviour.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And where do you think that, that could happen for you? It sounds like not in your home community because it is too small. Can that happen here?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No. I don't know. I never thought of it.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Do you think it can happen in Yellowknife?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: It is hard to say because I have no roof over my head. I cannot rely on the Salvation Army anymore.

MS. KERRIE REAY: What about family?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I don't want to bother them.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Do you think you would be bothering them if you were talking about coming back together as a family? Do you think that would be bothering them?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: That is going to take time.
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MS. KERRIE REAY: Baby steps. Small steps.
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Even my [family member] wishes I was dead.
MS. KERRIE REAY: Why do you think she --
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: She says that all the time when she drinks. She is a nice person when she's sober.
MS. KERRIE REAY: Why do you think she would say something like that?
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Because she has a different attitude in her. I don't know. I can't speak for her, so I can't answer the question.
MS. KERRIE REAY: No.
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I want to speak for myself. Their issues is their issues. I don't know what they think. So I cannot answer your questions about my brothers and sisters.
MS. KERRIE REAY: We were also talking about looking at repairing those relationships that have, sort of, fallen apart after the loss of your mom.
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I have to work on myself first.
MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Good.
MR. BERNARD MICHEL: That doesn't mean I'm
ignoring them. I have talked to them and everything. They say they have to work on themselves. I have to work on myself. I have to think about me first now.

MS. KERRIE REAY: What steps do you think you need to take so that you can start working on yourself? Like, real steps.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I think I should start talking to my probation officer and apologize.

MS. KERRIE REAY: They could be very helpful.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I think I should just go talk to counselors, like they said. I think I should just do that.

MS. KERRIE REAY: I think that is the beginning of a plan. That is the beginning of a good plan. It takes trust, and it's not easy. Nobody said talking to other people is easy.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I have to work on myself. Most times people are there for the money. They want to take advantage of it.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Some people really, truly are there to help people.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: They have a funny way of showing it, though.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And I don't know your
experience, but I know my experience working with many, many people. It is about helping. Lots of people get into different types of work to help people. It is not about the money. They truly want to help. But it is finding the right person for yourself, too; right?

And I think you have a beginning of a plan there -- talking with your probation officer. And sharing with the probation officer the concern about your privacy and the right to privacy. That is your right to have what you talk about to be private. It is not supposed to be out there for sharing. That is a right you have. I am just wondering, is there anything that we have not talked about that you want the Commissioners to know?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I spoke my mind.

MS. KERRIE REAY: You feel comfortable with what you have said? Is there anything else you would like to say on the record?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I just want to thank you for sharing my problems with you.

MS. KERRIE REAY: I hope it is the beginning of a healing journey for you.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: I would like to thank this stranger beside us.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. Thank you, Bruce.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Oh, Bruce? Okay.
Sorry.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Yes? No? I can read from a distance. If it was smaller, I would have to have my glasses on. So how are you feeling now?

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: Feeling better.

MS. KERRIE REAY: A little bit of the burden lifted? A little bit? Just one day at a time. If you feel comfortable, I can turn the recording off, or would you still like to say anything? I do not want to rush you.

MR. BERNARD MICHEL: No. I think I said what I need to say.

MS. KERRIE REAY: Okay. It has been tough since your mom passed away for you, and there is hope. There is hope. Okay. Alright. We will stop the recording at 2:11.

--- Whereupon the statement concluded at 2:11 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.

Jennifer Rotstein, Court Reporter