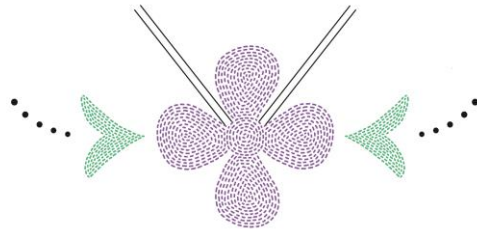


National Inquiry into  
Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Women and Girls



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

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



**PUBLIC**

**Thursday January 25, 2018**

**Statement - Volume 214**

**Ruth Mercredi,  
In relation to Janelle Mercredi,  
Shelly Mercredi & Diane Mercredi**

**Statement gathered by Marie-Audrey Girard,  
Commission Counsel**

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## II

### NOTE

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

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Statement gatherer: Marie-Audrey Girard, Commission Counsel

Documents submitted with testimony: none.

1 Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

2 --- Upon commencing on Thursday, January 25, 2018

3 at 5:51 p.m.

4 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: This is Marie-  
5 Audrey Girard. We are in Yellowknife, January 25. It is  
6 5:51. I am tonight with --

7 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Ruth. Ruth Mercredi,  
8 R-u-t-h M-e-r-c-r-e-d-i.

9 MS. KAM ANDERSON: And I am Kam Anderson  
10 (ph). I am with the health support team with the MMIWG.

11 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Okay. Thank  
12 you. And Ruth, before we start, I just wanted to confirm  
13 that you consented that we are video recording and tape  
14 recording this session.

15 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Oh, yes.

16 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Okay.  
17 Excellent. Well, Ruth, thank you so much for being with us  
18 tonight and for coming back. I am really glad you are  
19 here. I will start with my first question which is, what  
20 would you like to share with us today? What would you like  
21 the Commissioners to know about you and about your journey?

22 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: I want them to see  
23 what happened to our children. I would like to understand  
24 -- like, why these things could have been stopped. I would  
25 just like them to see where the pattern took us.

1 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And when you are  
2 saying, "what happened to the children," what are you  
3 referring to?

4 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: To my nieces, Janelle  
5 and Shelly, and to my daughter Deanna.

6 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And would you  
7 like to tell us a little bit about what happened to Janelle  
8 and Shelly and Deanna?

9 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Yes. Deanna.

10 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Deanna. I am  
11 sorry.

12 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: D-e-a-n-n-a.

13 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: That is my  
14 really strong French accent, so I am sorry. Deanna.

15 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Yes. They were really  
16 close, the three girls. Shelly was adopted out, but she  
17 came back to us in later years and got really close with my  
18 daughter Deanna and Janelle. And they grew up together.

19 So they were really close and did a lot of  
20 things together. Really happy-go-lucky girls, beautiful  
21 looking girls. Tall, you know, friendly. We were brought  
22 up in a really alcoholic family, you know. So a lot of  
23 those teachings were passed on to me and my siblings. And  
24 that is pretty well how I brought up my daughter. And my  
25 nieces, too, were always around alcohol and a lot of

1 violence and stuff like that in our community. And as  
2 the two -- like, when we speak about Janelle, because she  
3 was the one that was with us most of the time. She started  
4 drinking at a very young age also. So did my daughter.  
5 And I remember when we were all living in Edmonton at that  
6 time, we weren't living in the North.

7 And Janelle and my daughter Deanna came  
8 back here. Deanna was only about 13 years old, I think.  
9 They took off. They ran away from us. They came to  
10 Yellowknife. And my daughter was brutally raped when she  
11 was here. It really had an effect on her life, and I don't  
12 know if that had anything to do with her being two-spirit.  
13 She never wanted to be with a man. She always wanted to be  
14 with a woman.

15 It seemed to me that she had a -- oh, I  
16 don't know -- being an Indigenous woman, a girl, young  
17 girl, she was very dark in colour. And she had that  
18 already going against her because there was so much racism  
19 out there. And now she is a two-spirit woman. And that  
20 was another thing for them to beat her up for. She would  
21 be just walking down the street, and people would sucker  
22 punch her. And she was really -- how do you say? She was  
23 getting sick, too, from the alcohol.

24 And when she drank she wasn't coordinated  
25 very well. She was always falling down, hurting herself.

1 I remember she hurt her jaw. She was sitting at a bar like  
2 that, and she fell and broke her jaw on the bar stool table  
3 there. So she was really self-destructive. And I have  
4 always had kidney problems, and that kind of passed on to  
5 her, too, I think.

6 She had really bad kidneys also, so the  
7 drinking and the pills didn't help her. She didn't start  
8 the pills, though, until later on in life because we lost  
9 Janelle. Janelle got brutally murdered in 1986. And my  
10 daughter, being so close to her, really took it hard.

11 The day we buried Janelle, I remember  
12 coming home, and my daughter was upstairs, and we are all  
13 downstairs. And all of a sudden, she came falling down the  
14 stairs. I couldn't understand. I thought she was drunk,  
15 and I knew there was no alcohol there in the house. I  
16 said, "What are you drinking?" And she was all dazed and  
17 stuff. And she didn't smell of any alcohol, so I was  
18 saying, "What was going on?" And she was having a seizure.  
19 So we took her to the doctor the next day, and she had  
20 trauma seizures from what had happened.

21 So from then on they started to give her  
22 medication. And from what I can understand -- because she  
23 got into a relationship with another woman, and that  
24 relationship lasted for 30 years. They even got married.  
25 Very good relationship. It lasted longer than some of my

1 relationships. So it was really good. And they looked  
2 after and supported each other. So you know, it was  
3 something that I didn't really have to worry about her out  
4 there in the city.

5 But she was a heavy drinker. She liked to  
6 drink, and she was mixing it with these pills that the  
7 doctor was giving her. And they were also experimenting  
8 with her because they kept giving her a different kind of  
9 pills because they couldn't really see what was wrong.  
10 They couldn't get to the root of the problem.

11 So they were trying out all these  
12 different medications on her. And she would have these --  
13 she used to call it a "grand seizure." She had the big one  
14 where sometimes she wouldn't come out of it for three days.  
15 So with that and the alcohol that she was drinking, it shut  
16 her down. It shut her kidneys down. And she just dropped  
17 like that.

18 Prior to that, my niece Shelly passed  
19 away. Maybe about ten years after Janelle passed away.  
20 She was addicted to street drugs, and she would shoot it up  
21 her arm. After doing that for so many years, her lungs  
22 collapsed. She was in the hospital waiting for a lung when  
23 she passed away, and she was 30 years old. So that was  
24 very devastating for Deanna also because that was her --  
25 she really was close to those two girls.



1                   And she really started to drink a lot  
2 then. I wasn't always with her because she was in  
3 Edmonton, and I was living here. I didn't know a lot of  
4 things about medicine in those days. I was just learning.  
5 I had just come home, and the spirits just seemed to open  
6 the door for me when I came home, sending me the right  
7 teachers to learn about my way -- our way of life.

8                   And then I started to learn about all  
9 these different medicines and the side effects and all that  
10 stuff that it was having. [*Three sentences redacted -*  
11 *private information*].

12                   So Deanna would complain to me every time  
13 I go visit her in Edmonton about her back pain. So we take  
14 her to the doctor, and the doctor would say, "Oh, it's  
15 probably because she fell down and hurt herself," and stuff  
16 like this. So we trust doctors, and we just believed it.

17                   And I think a lot of my problem is guilt.  
18 Guilt. I should have seen it. I keep telling myself. I  
19 keep blaming myself. I should have seen it. I was too  
20 busy looking after everybody else to see what my daughter  
21 was going through. She never spoke. She never talked  
22 about her pain. She never talked about what she was going  
23 through. I tried to give her some teachings, but I think  
24 the pills had already got to her, and nothing was  
25 registering.

1                   I gave her all kinds of spiritual gifts  
2 when we were packing her stuff. All that was put away.  
3 She never used any of it. I went through a very -- anger  
4 set in. And I just was angry, angry. When somebody would  
5 pass away and the person would come to me I would be,  
6 "Well, so what? It was his time to go." So cynical. I  
7 was awful. Because I had lost my daughter, it didn't  
8 matter who died. Nobody could -- it wasn't worse than  
9 losing your own child. So what? That was my attitude. I  
10 got really cynical. I did.

11                   Yes. This was awful. So many things come  
12 up -- all the losses that we had. I know -- I don't know  
13 if I should mention my brother, but he was -- he passed  
14 away, also. [*Private information-one sentence redacted*].  
15 That affected the whole family big time when he passed  
16 away.

17                   And then after that the girls went. So  
18 like, we haven't even had time to deal with one passing and  
19 then you got to deal with another one, got to deal with  
20 another one and -- and it was just one anger after another  
21 building up, building up.

22                   And I'm not even myself anymore. I could  
23 feel it. I'm yelling at my partner. I'm always angry  
24 about something. I'm watching TV, and I'm swearing at the  
25 TV. Like, this is not normal for me. I'm not like this.

1 What's happened to me? I've been doing so much work on  
2 myself, and I just feel like I'm going backwards.

3 But I went through that time, and I  
4 thought I was really doing good. I thought I had pretty  
5 well let my daughter go, and now I can get back to work and  
6 do what I love to do. And then it just happened a few days  
7 ago that I was yelling and screaming at my partner for  
8 nothing.

9 And then I went to a meeting, and I was  
10 talking to William Greenland (ph). And he was sharing some  
11 of his stuff about men, and it just hit me. It's all the  
12 things I was doing to my partner. I was breaking his  
13 spirit. And he put up with that for ten years with me. I  
14 mean, what a man. What a man to do that for me. But he  
15 did. He did it. And I always told him, every time I got  
16 mad at him, I always would say, "I'm sorry. I won't do it  
17 again."

18 And right back again is what William was  
19 saying, "And they always say that they're never going to do  
20 it again." All the things he was saying were just hitting  
21 me right on the nail.

22 I was saying, "Oh, for God's sake." So I  
23 realized then that I hadn't let my daughter go. I had been  
24 playing a tough girl game that I never even allowed myself  
25 to grieve. I cut myself off from grieving. I didn't give

1 myself any time to do that. I didn't talk to anybody about  
2 it. I didn't look to find somebody else to talk about it.  
3 I heard my sister talking about her daughters all my life,  
4 so I didn't want to do that either. I could hear people  
5 getting tired of listening to her, so I didn't want to do  
6 that. Yes. With all the things that I teach, you know,  
7 you would think I would know, but we are the toughest on  
8 ourselves. I see that now. It's easier to look after  
9 somebody else than it is to look after yourself. Yes.

10                   And when I realized that -- and here I am  
11 talking to my sister to come and do something for herself.  
12 And I wasn't even thinking about me. And after I got here,  
13 I was like, maybe this is what I need, too. I need to  
14 release some of this anger and this guilt that I'm feeling.  
15 Blaming myself.

16                   This has all been passed on, all this  
17 learned behaviour. I see that. My mother taught us. I  
18 taught my daughter. And I started to make changes in my  
19 life over 30 years ago, now, when I started to heal myself  
20 with help from other people. It seems that the spirits  
21 just put the right people in there, and I started my  
22 journey down south by Sault Ste. Marie.

23                   I lived in a little place there called  
24 Mannitowatch (ph), and the Native people there adopted me.  
25 They took me into their hearts and their homes, and they

1 did a ceremony on me and gave me my Indian name, my  
2 colours. And I went on a journey that brought me back  
3 home. And from then on, the right teachers started coming  
4 my way there, too.

5                   People started telling me about my  
6 history, where I had come from, who I am. I started to get  
7 rooted, and I try to do that with my baby girl, too. I  
8 really try to teach her. And also, I have another daughter  
9 that is not even speaking to me today. I lost two  
10 daughters. I lost two daughters. One is still living, but  
11 she doesn't want nothing to do with me. And that is pretty  
12 hard to take.

13                   I tried to go there and make amends. And  
14 I did everything in my power to fix it. And I had to leave  
15 it like that because I did everything that I could. Now it  
16 is up to her. So I am giving her, her space. I am letting  
17 her heal whatever it is that she needs to heal. I can't  
18 change the past, I said. But I can certainly change the  
19 future. I'm not like that anymore. I'm not that same  
20 person I was when I was your mother and when you were  
21 young.

22                   I was pretty tough on my upbringing of my  
23 daughters because I had residential school teachings in me,  
24 and that is how I raised my kids: Through the residential  
25 school teachings that I had. It wasn't very good. I was

1 very strict. Yes. And I went down that journey, too. And  
2 I drank lots and had done a lot of things that I'm not  
3 proud of. Those things that I'm not proud of were my  
4 biggest teachers. It made me wake up.

5 But I'm way beyond that now. But my  
6 daughter still has lots of resentments, but I can't. I  
7 can't fix it for her. You know, now that I understand a  
8 lot now, you know, I've learned a lot in my journey. And I  
9 understand where she's coming from. And she has every  
10 right to feel that way. And I know she's going to fix it.  
11 I know we are. I just know it. I just have to give her  
12 some space.

13 It's been really hard. And her father  
14 raised her. I know when I left him, it wasn't in a very  
15 good way, so he kind of poisoned her mind against me. And  
16 I went back to BC, and I went to her father, and I  
17 apologized to him. I apologized to all the people that I  
18 hurt in my past, to my children. I did all those things.  
19 I made my amends. I found it really healing to sit with my  
20 ex-husband and clear the air. I did that with my -- I have  
21 two ex-husbands. I have children from both.

22 I have a son and daughter from my second  
23 husband. And I had three daughters with my first husband.  
24 Very good men, both of them. They taught me lots. I have  
25 no regrets with them at all. And I went to them, and I

1 apologized to both of them. They're my best buddies today.  
2 So you know, we keep in touch. We have grandchildren and  
3 things like that. Things are really civil, and I like  
4 that.

5 I like to keep those doors open, but I  
6 wasn't always like that. I had to let go of a lot of  
7 behaviours that didn't suit my life today. When I was  
8 going through all this anger and stuff, I picked it up  
9 again. I picked up these behaviours again without even  
10 realizing I was doing it. But thank God I'm not there  
11 anymore. I'm back on track again now.

12 And I think that's why the spirits are  
13 opening my mind to see things that I'm doing to myself.  
14 Because I was so angry and so full of guilt. A lot of our  
15 family is like that today. They are still drinking and  
16 stuff like that. But that's what we were taught. We were  
17 taught to do that. It's hard. [*Four sentences redacted -*  
18 *private information*].

19 But I don't judge her. I don't judge  
20 people now. I learned not to do that, you know. I don't  
21 judge people for their lifestyles anymore. That is just  
22 the way it is. That's how, you know, for me, if we had the  
23 right teachings, like, from day one, we would be so much  
24 healthier. Like, we're living in another culture that  
25 doesn't belong to us, and makes it very confusing.

1                   It makes us lost, mixed up. It makes us  
2 want to pick up things that are not good for us. I see  
3 that in the people today. I see where all of that pain is  
4 coming from. So it's hard. You know, when you look at  
5 that, why do you want to put more pain on them by judging  
6 them? I don't know why they do that. I see it too often,  
7 people putting more by judging people. They are putting  
8 more pain. I don't want to feed that. I don't want to  
9 feed it.

10                   We need more traditional people because  
11 sometimes us healers, we need help, too. And we just can't  
12 go to anybody, because a lot of people don't know how to  
13 help us healers. So we need more healers to help the  
14 healers because we are human too. They put a lot of  
15 expectations on us, expecting us to be a certain way. I  
16 want to break those things.

17                   We're so conditioned and programmed. We  
18 can't even be who we are one hundred percent. That is why  
19 we're walking around so unhappy, where people are carrying  
20 so much baggage on them. I only had one year in  
21 residential school, but I'm not sorry I went there, even  
22 though I was mistreated for that one year really bad.

23                   But I have compassion now for the people  
24 that are there, the people that I had met there. That's a  
25 connection I have now all over the North now. All the



1 communities, we have that connection. That is what brings  
2 us together. That is one good thing that came out of it.  
3 Yes. And we all have a common goal now. We all want to  
4 get better. We want to get out of this. And I noticed  
5 today, people are calling each other "Aboriginal people,"  
6 not Inuit, Dene -- Aboriginal people coming together.

7 I see so much good change coming. I  
8 believe from our teachings, our way of life is a knowing.  
9 It's not a belief. It's a knowing. You just know. The  
10 way the system is today, they make us believe in things we  
11 don't even know. We're praying to people we don't even  
12 know. Our ancestors are just waiting for us to pray to  
13 them. Nobody is even praying to them.

14 They switch it around on us. They make us  
15 believe in something we don't even know. Our people are so  
16 mixed up. Europeans brought their beliefs over here, and  
17 we have fallen for that. I want to see more of our way of  
18 life, teachings out there in the schools. More on the land  
19 -- on-land stuff where we have hands-on.

20 Too much sitting at the desk. We're  
21 really being moolah (ph) people. That's what we call them:  
22 Moolah. You know, they are a different culture altogether.  
23 We don't sit behind a desk all day long. We're connected  
24 to mother earth. She draws us. We're just drawn to her.  
25 And it's difficult for our children to be sitting in a

1 school all day long like that, listening to people talk,  
2 talk, talk, talk.

3                   Our way of life is not like that. We  
4 don't talk much. We just look at each other, and we know  
5 exactly what to do. All those good things that we want to  
6 bring back. So much good talk downstairs today about how -  
7 - not enough stories women are sharing. They are not being  
8 acknowledged, their stories. How the stories that they  
9 tell don't make a lot of sense; right? Elders tell  
10 stories, and it doesn't make sense to the children. So we  
11 have to put more detail into it, and I really agree with  
12 that.

13                   And I really believe that a big movement  
14 is coming, and our people are going to be rooted again. My  
15 mother was a strong believer, and my mother was a really  
16 traditional woman. She was an original Dene woman. I  
17 don't know if you know the true history here in the North,  
18 but the Rocher River people are the ones that signed the  
19 treaty.

20                   That's my people. We are the original  
21 Dene people. We don't even have a home. We're scattered  
22 all over the place, all over the world. And in order to  
23 get our treaty back, we have to move back to our community,  
24 and it's no longer there. So the Akaitcho people and the  
25 Chipewyan people have taken over our treaty that belongs to

1 the Rocher River people.

2 I don't blame them because it's the  
3 government that did that -- went that far, told the people  
4 that we were all dead. So we had to go see a lawyer after  
5 my daughter passed away. I came back home again, and I ran  
6 into my cousin Nolene Vilbrun (ph). And her and my cousin  
7 were going out to Edmonton to see a lawyer to see if they  
8 can help us know what our rights are as Rocher River  
9 people. And so I wasn't doing anything at that time,  
10 because my daughter just passed away. So I said, "Okay.  
11 I'll go back with you guys," because I really wanted to  
12 learn more about our people.

13 So we went to go see a lawyer, and that's  
14 what he told us. He said, "You have to go back to your  
15 community where your people signed the treaty," he said.  
16 "And then you can claim your treaty back."

17 So that's what I'm working towards right  
18 now, is trying to get my people together so we can go back  
19 to our community and claim our treaty. Because the way  
20 it's going now, the right people don't have the treaty, so  
21 the government is coming in here and they're raping us.  
22 The people can say no, no, no to industry all they want but  
23 because it's not their treaty, they have no say.

24 And the government -- like, I have a  
25 little B&B in Lutselk'e (ph) and the lawyers come there and

1 stay at my house that are negotiating for the treaty. And  
2 I ask them out of curiosity, "How are the negotiations  
3 going?"

4 He said, "not very good." He said the  
5 government is saying that these Lutselk'e people sold their  
6 land a long time ago. I didn't say anything. I was just  
7 curious. I could have told him that because they are not  
8 dealing with the right people, that's why. But I thought,  
9 no. I will just leave it alone until our people get  
10 healthier, because I don't want to confuse them any more  
11 than they are.

12 They're having a hard time already trying  
13 to get their land rights. And so I thought, well, all I  
14 have to do is tell the story about our Rocher River people  
15 and get those people to stand with us. And I think we're  
16 going to be able to work together because we're all family  
17 now. That's what it's become.

18 Everywhere I go there's mixed blood in  
19 every community. In Lutselk'e most of the people there are  
20 mixed blood with Dogrib in there. I say, so why do we  
21 fight amongst each other? Why do we call the Dogrib people  
22 down? I said, you guys are Dogrib too. You're calling  
23 yourself down now. You got to stop that. We're all  
24 Aboriginal, Indian people, whatever you want to call it.

25 So those kinds of things, those kinds of

1 teachings have got to go. Somebody sitting here calling  
2 Inuit people down. And they're saying, "Oh, you don't have  
3 a hard time." I said, you know what, I said, that is all  
4 learned behaviour. They teach us to hate each other so we  
5 don't get together. We separate.

6 I said, but when you look at those Inuit  
7 people, I said, don't they look a lot like us? They're  
8 Aboriginal people. They adjust to where their environment  
9 is. I said, that's why their eyes are a little bit more  
10 slanted. Because it's so hard to see up there in the North  
11 country.

12 You know, and make people see -- take a  
13 look at what they're really doing, and this is what's  
14 happening now with the people that have been doing this  
15 kind of work. We're being really honest. We're being  
16 honest. No more patting on the back saying everything is  
17 going to be okay. No. We have to be strong enough to get  
18 right to the root of the problem, right away. And it's  
19 working. They're coming to traditional healers and  
20 traditional counseling. People are saying they've never  
21 had counseling like that in their life.

22 William was telling me how he builds up  
23 his clients. He doesn't remind them that they have an  
24 addiction. He doesn't remind them that their past is all -  
25 - you know, he just builds from today. From today, you

1 leave the past out there. That's how -- I live like that  
2 today.

3                   And it was hard work to get here. Hard  
4 work. Lots of judging. It's a killer, that judging. My  
5 kids went through that lots. Deanna, she was judged so  
6 much because she was two-spirit. Big time. She was always  
7 beaten up. She was always -- broken arm. The day she got  
8 married, she had a broken arm. She fell down when she was  
9 drunk. All that was so senseless. Everything, the way  
10 these girls died, the lifestyle they had, it didn't have to  
11 be like that.

12                   If we had our own way, if we weren't  
13 living another culture, I think they would have had a  
14 chance in life, those girls. And my sister was so ashamed  
15 of her daughters being prostitutes. I was never ashamed of  
16 my daughter being two-spirt. I was never ashamed of my  
17 nieces being prostitutes because I looked beyond that.  
18 They were more than that. Those girls were more than that,  
19 and I could see that. They taught me so much. Those girls  
20 taught me a lot.

21                   And those are the things that I want to  
22 take with me and share with the rest of the world, is what  
23 they taught me, all the good things. Even though they were  
24 in pain, they were always happy. Happy, happy girls all  
25 the time. Pretty. Oh, my gosh. That's the worst thing.

1 It's hard to be pretty because you know everybody wants  
2 you. Long-legged girls, both of them, Shelly and Janelle.

3 That's why my daughter loved them so much.  
4 My daughter wasn't as pretty. She was a little short but  
5 strong, strong girl. She just loved her cousins so much.  
6 So she started to get pretty sick, anyway, after she was  
7 taking those pills. And there was nothing I could do for  
8 her. I realize now, you know, there is not much I could  
9 have done. I had done the best I could with what I knew.  
10 It was her choice. She was an adult.

11 I didn't have the teachings to give her  
12 because I didn't have those teachings until later on in  
13 life. But elders tell us that we don't die. We can come  
14 back as many times as we want. A little elder, a little  
15 clansmother, 16 years old, when I went out to go see the  
16 lawyer. It was his daughter.

17 She was the oldest woman in her tribe.  
18 Sixteen years old. So she was a clansmother already. Yes.  
19 And she's the one that told me. She came over, and she  
20 gave me a big hug. And she says, "You know what? We don't  
21 die," she says. I was crying about my daughter. She said,  
22 "We don't die." She said, "We can come back as many times  
23 as we want," she said.

24 I mean, the spirits just know what they're  
25 doing. They just send the right people. What a wise

1 little girl. And I said, "Yes. You're so right." And I  
2 said, "I teach that, and look at me. I don't even believe  
3 my own teachings." I said, "Thank you so much for  
4 reminding me." And I said, "It makes it a little bit  
5 easier."

6                   It does. I know what I need to do now. I  
7 need to grieve. I've got to allow myself to grieve and to  
8 let her go. So they are already working on a sweat for me.  
9 They're working on a sweat for me, so I'm going to do a  
10 sweat. I'm taking care of my aftercare. I want to do  
11 anger management. And I want to do talking circles, and  
12 they really help me.

13                   MS. KAM ANDERSON: You know, one thing,  
14 Ruth, that I am thinking. You are a helper and a healer.  
15 What would you say to somebody else? What would you say to  
16 your friend or someone you were healing? Are they any of  
17 the same things that you are thinking about for yourself?  
18 Or is it something totally different? You are tough,  
19 tough, tough all the time; right?

20                   MS. RUTH MERCREDI: I know. Yes.

21                   MS. KAM ANDERSON: I think about, sort of,  
22 it is maybe, not the opposite, but being vulnerable. You  
23 know, to grieve and to let some stuff go and to let  
24 yourself do what you need to do. For me, I sort of picture  
25 it as almost the opposite of being tough. Because tough is



1 like this and not letting in and not allowing it. But I do  
2 not know if that has altogether worked for you. But yes.  
3 What if you let yourself not be tough, or you did not have  
4 to be tough?

5 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: I know.

6 MS. KAM ANDERSON: Could you do what you  
7 recommend to other people? Like, how come you will not let  
8 yourself do what you would suggest to someone else; right?

9 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: That's what I say.  
10 It's so easy to look after someone else. We know we're not  
11 perfect. But, you know, when you're healing yourself and  
12 you're seeing all the big changes in you, you almost feel  
13 perfect. You know? That's where I'm at right now because  
14 I've been doing this for quite a while now. I'm 68 years  
15 old. You know, I know, like, I probably need some work on  
16 myself and stuff like that. But you just, kind of, push it  
17 aside, you know. Like, I'll do that later.

18 MS. KAM ANDERSON: And sometimes you need  
19 to and sometimes you have to. And you know, when you think  
20 about a journey, is it a start? Is it a finish? Is it a  
21 perfectly straight road? Or do you see it as more,  
22 sometimes, you know, a road twists and turns or goes up and  
23 down hills.

24 Like, sometimes your own journey -- you  
25 get off a bit and then get back on when you need to and

1 when you're ready. Like, is that how it goes? Are you  
2 always right on? Or sometimes are you off for a bit, but  
3 that's okay. You can always jump back on; right?

4 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Yes. That seems to be  
5 my journey, because I go off like that. And then I'll come  
6 back on. Because of what I've been taught, you know how to  
7 do that.

8 MS. KAM ANDERSON: I think that is how a  
9 lot of people are, especially when you are a helper. You  
10 are always the one guiding them back on. This is what you  
11 are seeing, but I think everybody goes off and on a bit.  
12 And I think that is okay.

13 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: You know, that is what  
14 my teachers tell me. Sometimes you have to go off because  
15 that, sometimes, is your biggest, greatest teaching, is  
16 when you go off. But you got to come back on again.

17 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Yes.

18 MS. KAM ANDERSON: I think for you, you  
19 should ask if it is not okay for you to do that. Is it  
20 okay for you to do that?

21 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: It's okay for me to do  
22 that.

23 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: I am sorry to  
24 interrupt. If you want, we can take a small break.

25 MS. KAM ANDERSON: And I am sorry if I am

1 jumping in too much.

2 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: No problem. I  
3 think it is important, but we can maybe just take a small  
4 break from your testimony. If we want to talk about this,  
5 I am totally okay to talk about that, but we just have --

6 MS. KAM ANDERSON: Sure. And I am just  
7 going to sit back.

8 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: No. I think it  
9 is really important. It is really important. If we can  
10 take a small break --

11 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: No, no. I'm fine.  
12 But she hit it right on the nail. And it's okay, like you  
13 said. It is okay for me to do that because I am human;  
14 right?

15 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Absolutely.

16 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: It's just I think I  
17 worry too much about what people think. Because when you  
18 do that, people judge you, you know. Their expectations of  
19 you are all out of proportion. And that's something that I  
20 have to work on. I kind of walk my walk and never mind  
21 what other people think. And, sure, maybe I may go off,  
22 but I go back on again. And that's where I'm at right now.

23 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And as you said,  
24 we are all humans; right?

25 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: We're human.

1 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Perfection does  
2 not exist.

3 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: No. I like to think  
4 that, though, you know, being human. Yes. You are right.  
5 I do. I need sometimes to go off and be human and make  
6 mistakes. And I get hard on myself. I'm the one that's my  
7 worst enemy. I get hard on myself when I do that, when I  
8 go off. Blaming myself for things that I got no control  
9 over. I see that now. I see a lot of things now, today.  
10 Just from today, though.

11 I didn't want to see it before because I  
12 was kind of comfortable in my anger. I really was. I was  
13 kind of comfortable in there because -- oh, my gosh. I  
14 could just snarl at that person, and they were all scared  
15 of me. And since I have moved up to that community too,  
16 people are pretty tough in the communities. I understand  
17 why now, but they are pretty tough. And I had to be a  
18 tough girl a few times. There was some people.

19 And I think that kind of encouraged me,  
20 you know. So I just kind of kept up that tough girl act.  
21 And it was also working for my grieving. I would get  
22 really tough and say, "No. I let my daughter go."  
23 Meanwhile, I needed more time to grieve. I needed that  
24 time maybe to talk about it with somebody. I never looked  
25 for that kind of -- for help. I never looked for it.

1                   So I see now. Because I would expect  
2 somebody, if they lost somebody, to go look for help. I  
3 would tell them, "You know, you should go talk to  
4 somebody." Yes. I would do that. But not for myself,  
5 though. We're so hard on ourselves. But yes. I'm  
6 grateful. I'm grateful. Thank you for encouraging me to  
7 do this. It was you guys that did this, that encouraged  
8 me. Because I didn't really think I needed it, you know.

9                   I'm really happy for my sister too, you  
10 know, because we had a lot of losses. We both lost our  
11 parents at a very young age. And then we lost our brother  
12 and then our daughters. Oh, gosh, you know. It is quite a  
13 bit of stuff, isn't it? I never really looked at it that  
14 way because we're not the only ones that took so many  
15 losses. So many families that we know, you know. So I  
16 never really thought too much about it. But when I talk  
17 about it, I think, oh, gosh we went through a lot, our  
18 family. Yes.

19                   We had stepfathers, too, and we had sex  
20 abuse in our family. And not very good. Sex abuse;  
21 watching our mother get beaten up; hiding knives in the  
22 middle of the night because people are drunk, and we know  
23 they're going to fight. So my [Family member] and I would  
24 hide all the knives and sharp things. And sometimes we  
25 would get up in the morning, and all the furniture is all

1 over the place, upside down. The stove is not where it's  
2 supposed to be on the side of the wall. Yes.

3 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Ruth, can I take  
4 you back a little bit? You were saying that you were at  
5 the residential school for a year and that you had been  
6 mistreated there. Can you give us a little bit more detail  
7 about what happened at the residential school?

8 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: When we went to  
9 residential school, we were in Rocher River. My mother  
10 took us there because she didn't want us to go to school,  
11 period. And so she took us away from Yellowknife and  
12 brought us to her community. There was nobody there then,  
13 but, you know, they still had little houses there. So they  
14 took us there. And there was a couple of other families  
15 there, too, with little kids. This was in June.

16 And I remember going there by dog team in  
17 June, with lots of snow and ice. From Fort Resolution, I  
18 went to Rocher River by dog team in June. And I remember  
19 being there all summer long. In the fall a great, big RCMP  
20 plane flew in there and picked up all us kids.

21 I didn't know at that time where we were  
22 going. I was really spoiled rotten. My mother spoiled me.  
23 And I remember her -- she was disciplining me that day, and  
24 she was mad at me. So when the RCMP plane came and took  
25 us, I was just happy because my mom was mad at me, so I was

1 teaching her a lesson. I was going to go with these guys,  
2 and so what a mistake.

3 As soon as I got to residential school, I  
4 was crying for my mom, and I got a slap on the side of the  
5 head. And that didn't stop, because I was a crybaby. All  
6 my life I've been a crybaby. They called me a crybaby. So  
7 I used to cry for everything, and I would get my way. But  
8 not like that in residential school. Every time I cried, I  
9 got a slap on the side of the head.

10 And they ripped the clothes off me. I had  
11 a hole in a wool sweater. I had a hole in it, and I was  
12 sent home from school, because I went to school and I had a  
13 103 fever. And I didn't tell the nun I was sick because I  
14 didn't want to stay with her. I wanted to go to school  
15 because I loved my teacher, Mr. Tagman (ph). He was so  
16 kind and so nice, and I didn't want to stay with this nun.

17 So I went to school sick, and Mr. Tagman  
18 sent me home. He said, "Ruth, you're sick. You got to go  
19 back." So the priest came and picked me up and took me  
20 back. And it was just me and the nun there. And then she  
21 started getting mad at me for going to school, being sick.  
22 And then she saw the hole in my sweater.

23 Well, then she just took her finger in it,  
24 and she tried to rip it off me. And she was dragging me  
25 all over because you can't rip wool. And so she was

1 dragging me all over the place in her little room there,  
2 pulling me around, trying to rip the sweater off me. It  
3 was just her and I there. Yes.

4                   There was a lot of that. She would send  
5 me to bed with my hair half curled. My hair was half  
6 curled. She would send me to bed like that. So I'm trying  
7 to curl my hair under the covers. And we used to wake up  
8 sometimes in the middle of the night, and we didn't have no  
9 blankets on us, and our gowns were up. And I couldn't  
10 remember anything happening that time, but I remember  
11 waking up with no blankets on us -- on me. Yes.

12                   So we only spent one year there. My  
13 mother moved back to Yellowknife because she didn't want us  
14 to go back to residential school again. So that was one  
15 good thing that she did. But, like I say, I'm not sorry I  
16 went. I learned that I can relate to the people here now,  
17 you know, what they talk about, residential school.

18                   But we already have the effects of it  
19 because of my parents and my grandparents. So we already  
20 had the teachings of that. It was a rough one year. I was  
21 spoiled rotten, and I really paid for it. And I've watched  
22 other kids, too, being punished, and that's hard to watch.  
23 And there were some that were such little angels. So I was  
24 like, "I really want to try to be like that." So one year.  
25 That's all we spent there, me and Martha. So we were very



1 lucky, I say.

2 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Ruth, you also  
3 mentioned that there have been some episodes of sexual  
4 abuse in your family. Is that something that you would  
5 like to share with us? What happened exactly?

6 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: My stepfather molested  
7 me while I was sleeping. I was passed out. I was about,  
8 maybe, 15 years old, and everybody was drinking at our  
9 house. And I wasn't drinking with them, but I came home  
10 from a party. And everybody was drinking there, so I just  
11 went to bed, and I passed out.

12 When I woke up, my stepfather had all my  
13 clothes off and was raping me. And I never said anything  
14 to anybody because he did the same thing to my [Family  
15 member], and my mother didn't believe her. So I never said  
16 anything about it. I just kept it to myself, but I really  
17 threatened him. I held that over him. I always told him,  
18 I said, "If I ever hear of you bothering anybody like  
19 that," I said, "I'll be the first one to testify."

20 And I forgave him before he went to the  
21 spirit world. I forgave him. But yes. And that wasn't  
22 the only incident. Like, we had people partying there, and  
23 we're trying to sleep, and guys would come and try to feel  
24 us up while we were in the bed. Me and my [Family member]  
25 would be sleeping together. Like, we would always kick

1 them. They would leave us alone, but a lot of that stuff  
2 went on. Lots of sex abuse and all kinds of abuse,  
3 fighting. That's how we were raised. There was a lot of  
4 that stuff.

5 My daughter was abused too. She came to  
6 Yellowknife and she was raped by her own cousin. My  
7 brother was telling me the story. He said she was walking  
8 down the street. He said her clothes were all ripped off.  
9 That's how she was looking for help, and nobody would help  
10 her. With her pants all ripped, her crotch was just  
11 hanging out, he said.

12 I think about that guy who did that to  
13 her. He's in the spirit world now. He just passed away.  
14 [Daughter's cousin]. It was pretty hard to take. You  
15 blame yourself for that, too, you know. I blame myself for  
16 that. I think if I was a better mother, that wouldn't have  
17 happened. If I was there for her -- it's hard to be there  
18 for someone else when you are sick, too, yourself.

19 I was doing really heavy drinking them  
20 days. I wasn't into too much drugs. I didn't care much  
21 for drugs. But alcohol was my vice. My nieces too. They  
22 were all sexually abused by people we trust. I can  
23 understand them going doing what they did. That's all they  
24 thought they were good for. I thought that of myself for a  
25 long time. I thought that's all I was good for.

1                   It really does something to you when they  
2 do that to you. It breaks your spirit. It makes you go  
3 within. You are not out there. You're like this, wounded  
4 people like that when they hurt you in your sacred space.  
5 It's really hard. You think you're no good for nothing.  
6 You're dirty. And that's the thing that you keep feeding.  
7 I'm no good for nothing. What am I good for? That sex  
8 abuse is killer.

9                   MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Do you know if  
10 Deanna ever reported the rape to the police, for instance?

11                   MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Never.

12                   MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Never?

13                   MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Never. You know, I  
14 think if I was here at that time, I probably would have  
15 myself, because I'm a fighter like that. But I wasn't  
16 here. I was in Edmonton, and I was doing my own thing  
17 there. Her and my niece ran away, took off here. And  
18 that's when that happened. And she never did report it.  
19 And she went through lots of abuse after that because of  
20 racism and a two-spirit person.

21                   And she hung around where there's lots of  
22 violence, down in the drag (ph), they call it, you know.  
23 The only time I ever had the guts to go down the drag was  
24 when I was drunk. I would never go down there when I was  
25 sober. But my daughter was down there.

1                   And she would go down there sober and come  
2 back drunk. And sometimes all beaten up and oh, my gosh.  
3 My poor girl. She's in a good place now. Since she's  
4 passed away, you know, I haven't worried about her. I  
5 haven't worried about her at all. I was getting a little  
6 bit of peace of mind right there, because I know she's in a  
7 good place now. Nobody is going to hurt her. It was  
8 always my biggest worry.

9                   Every time she would phone me. We were  
10 really close, my daughter and I. My oldest daughter. I  
11 would go to Edmonton three times -- you know, as many times  
12 as I can, try to make it there just to visit with her, just  
13 to be with her. But now I don't even want to go to  
14 Edmonton. I don't care. I have nothing to go there for.  
15 But I go there for her.

16                   I've never been close to my second oldest.  
17 We didn't have that connection, you know. But I really  
18 wanted to. I wanted to work on that. I really do, because  
19 I'm not that same person anymore. I was a pretty strict  
20 mom. I know that. I was a lot easier on my second  
21 children than I was on my first. But I was really strict.  
22 Like, you know, with a belt because that's how we were --  
23 we were strapped with a belt. And so that's how I did with  
24 my kids, too. I see now, today it's not the way to do it.  
25 My daughter has resentments about those things.

1 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And Ruth, we  
2 have been talking a lot and you were mentioning that the  
3 people need to go back to traditional teaching, and I find  
4 it really interesting. So if I had to ask you how to stop  
5 the violence against Indigenous women and girls, how to  
6 improve the situation, like, this is one recommendation.

7 But would you have any other  
8 recommendations that you can give us to stop this cycle of  
9 violence that you are referring to? How can we improve the  
10 situation? How can the violence against Indigenous women  
11 and girls cease? What can be done to improve the  
12 situation? I know it's a really broad question.

13 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Yes. I know. I have  
14 so many things going on in my head. Where do I start?  
15 Well, for instance, like, now, they are speaking up. There  
16 is no more silence. Like, there still is, but people are  
17 starting to see. Like, you see in the news about all that  
18 sexual abuse. One person came out. Now every day, every  
19 day, every day. So I see that happening here. Happening  
20 here.

21 It 's going to hit the communities because  
22 people are already talking about it. Even if they're  
23 talking about it when they're drinking, that's a start. No  
24 more silence. And making people aware. We know that this  
25 is happening. And I even feel like even approaching these

1 people, telling them that, you know, we know what's  
2 happening. If you need help, we're willing to help you.  
3 Being upfront and honest.

4                   And I think more education on it, too,  
5 like, more awareness. Because when they see that, these  
6 abusers, they start to feel things and feeling guilty or  
7 shame or something to make them look at themselves so they  
8 can get help. Because right now, there's men's programs  
9 opening up now, more and more. More men are seeking help.

10                   And Mike Natalie (ph) or one of the MLAs  
11 from one of the Dogrib (ph) region, he abused his wife.  
12 And so he went to a program and got healing for himself.  
13 Now, I think that is really powerful to see a leader like  
14 that, that's been down that road, and now he's trying to  
15 heal himself from that.

16                   You know, things like that are so powerful  
17 when you see that. And William Greenland has a wonderful  
18 program there for men today. And I feel that it's time for  
19 the men and women to get together. We used to have women's  
20 circles. They didn't want men there. Men don't want women  
21 there. I think it's time now to start speaking to each  
22 other about how we're feeling to each other like that.

23                   To make more awareness, more openness, and  
24 so we're clear of what we want in the future, how we're  
25 going to heal, help each other. Because we're in this

1 together. We want our men to walk in balance with us. We  
2 don't want to get rid of them or put them in jail. We want  
3 them to be healthy and walk beside us because they're our  
4 warriors. They take care of us women, even though we're  
5 the boss. They're okay with that because they're warriors.  
6 They know their place.

7                   That's how our way of life used to be.  
8 The women were the boss. They're the ones that chose the  
9 chief. The men were okay with that. They took care of us.  
10 And this is where we want that balance to come back again.  
11 We are not asking you to give up everything you love in  
12 life. We're just asking you to find a balance with it.

13                   And that's what I tell [*14 sentences*  
14 *redacted - private information*]. Yes.

15                   So you know, you just find a balance with  
16 things. And more, I say, healthy elders. We have to have  
17 a program or something for elders so they can also --  
18 they've been so affected by religion, and it's really hard  
19 to connect. Especially with the young people. The young  
20 people are having a hard time to connect to the residential  
21 school elders. Their teachings -- the kids don't like  
22 that, the teachings.

23                   So we're trying to get that in there  
24 somehow, our way of life, with a little bit more detail,  
25 because sometimes the elders don't give too much detail.

1 And I said, well that comes with residential school,  
2 because they're only taught so much and then the rest, they  
3 put it away.

4 I said, and some of those things that were  
5 taught, too, in the books, it's not the true history of our  
6 people. I said, you have to go find out from healthy  
7 elders that know the true history of our people. You got  
8 to be wise enough to know that. So that's where healing  
9 comes in. Healing is so important. And to leave that past  
10 behind.

11 Too often, people come in, and they're so  
12 wounded. And they're carrying all that past on their back.  
13 And they're so ashamed and feel so guilty that they don't  
14 want to heal. It's just too much for them. And we see it  
15 all the time. So sometimes, when we take them out for a  
16 picnic on the land, we don't even talk about healing,  
17 because that's all people tell them. "Go get some  
18 healing."

19 So we talk about other things --  
20 interesting other things, make them feel comfortable with  
21 us first before we start attacking them. Healing is so  
22 important. I always say when you look at health, it says  
23 "heal" in it. So it's good to be healthy, mind, body,  
24 emotions, and spirit. Since we've been affected by  
25 residential school, we're just going mind; body, mind;



1 body.

2                   We're not even connected to our hearts.  
3 That's why our people are so mixed up and so confused.  
4 They don't even know what love is. And the feedback from  
5 this missing and murdered inquiry here, it was so powerful,  
6 the people coming out of here saying how they felt, the  
7 power. And I really believe it's because of all the  
8 medicines that they're burning downstairs, all the sharing,  
9 all the honesty.

10                   Because people never said anything like  
11 that when you go into a meeting and there's no medicine, no  
12 smudge. Nobody's praying. You come out. You're just  
13 feeling exhausted and cranky and miserable. Not with this  
14 inquiry. People are walking out of here feeling so good  
15 about themselves, ready to take on the whole world. And  
16 that's the kind -- that's what we want. More like that.

17                   The way you guys are running here -- are  
18 doing things here, that's what we want to see more of.  
19 People are caring. They're going to listen to us and not  
20 tell us how to do it, you know. We have been told that all  
21 our life. Pray to this one. You got to go to church. You  
22 can't do that. You can't be like that. Don't cry. Don't  
23 get angry. Here you guys are telling us, "Do all that."  
24 And I really am grateful. I really am. And I really feel  
25 good. Yes, I do.

1 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Excellent.

2 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: I don't feel so, like  
3 -- I had this little (indiscernible) in here. I have to  
4 get mad. But that is just like this now. It's like this  
5 now. It's like a little bit more is leaving. Thank you so  
6 much. If it was up to me, I would not be here.

7 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Thank you for  
8 sharing with us, Ruth. Thank you for coming and putting  
9 you trust in us, as well. Thank you very much.

10 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: You're welcome. Yes.  
11 And I hope --

12 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: If it is okay  
13 with you, I will turn off the recorder now. Unless you  
14 want to --

15 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: No, that's fine. No.  
16 I'm fine. Thank you.

17 MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: So it is 7:03.  
18 The time is 7:03, and we are finishing the session.

19 MS. KAM ANDERSON: Thank you for letting  
20 me be here, too.

21 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Oh, you were awesome.  
22 --- Whereupon the statement concluded at 7:03 p.m.

23  
24  
25

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