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

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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NOTE

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Statement gatherer: Marie-Audrey Girard, Commission Counsel

Documents submitted with testimony: none.
Upon commencing on Thursday, January 25, 2018 at 5:51 p.m.

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


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

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

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Oh, yes.

MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Okay.

Excellent. Well, Ruth, thank you so much for being with us tonight and for coming back. I am really glad you are here. I will start with my first question which is, what would you like to share with us today? What would you like the Commissioners to know about you and about your journey?

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: I want them to see what happened to our children. I would like to understand -- like, why these things could have been stopped. I would just like them to see where the pattern took us.
MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And when you are saying, "what happened to the children," what are you referring to?

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

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

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Yes. Deanna.

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

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

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

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Yes. They were really close, the three girls. Shelly was adopted out, but she came back to us in later years and got really close with my daughter Deanna and Janelle. And they grew up together. So they were really close and did a lot of things together. Really happy-go-lucky girls, beautiful looking girls. Tall, you know, friendly. We were brought up in a really alcoholic family, you know. So a lot of those teachings were passed on to me and my siblings. And that is pretty well how I brought up my daughter. And my nieces, too, were always around alcohol and a lot of
violence and stuff like that in our community. And as the two -- like, when we speak about Janelle, because she was the one that was with us most of the time. She started drinking at a very young age also. So did my daughter. And I remember when we were all living in Edmonton at that time, we weren't living in the North.

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

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

And when she drank she wasn't coordinated very well. She was always falling down, hurting herself.
I remember she hurt her jaw. She was sitting at a bar like that, and she fell and broke her jaw on the bar stool table there. So she was really self-destructive. And I have always had kidney problems, and that kind of passed on to her, too, I think.

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

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

So from then on they started to give her medication. And from what I can understand -- because she got into a relationship with another woman, and that relationship lasted for 30 years. They even got married. Very good relationship. It lasted longer than some of my
relationships. So it was really good. And they looked
after and supported each other. So you know, it was
something that I didn't really have to worry about her out
there in the city.

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

They couldn't get to the root of the problem.

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

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

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

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

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

And I think a lot of my problem is guilt. Guilt. I should have seen it. I keep telling myself. I keep blaming myself. I should have seen it. I was too busy looking after everybody else to see what my daughter was going through. She never spoke. She never talked about her pain. She never talked about what she was going through. I tried to give her some teachings, but I think the pills had already got to her, and nothing was registering.
I gave her all kinds of spiritual gifts when we were packing her stuff. All that was put away. She never used any of it. I went through a very -- anger set in. And I just was angry, angry. When somebody would pass away and the person would come to me I would be, "Well, so what? It was his time to go." So cynical. I was awful. Because I had lost my daughter, it didn't matter who died. Nobody could -- it wasn't worse than losing your own child. So what? That was my attitude. I got really cynical. I did.

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

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

And I'm not even myself anymore. I could feel it. I'm yelling at my partner. I'm always angry about something. I'm watching TV, and I'm swearing at the TV. Like, this is not normal for me. I'm not like this.
What's happened to me? I've been doing so much work on myself, and I just feel like I'm going backwards.

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

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

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

I was saying, "Oh, for God's sake." So I realized then that I hadn't let my daughter go. I had been playing a tough girl game that I never even allowed myself to grieve. I cut myself off from grieving. I didn't give
myself any time to do that. I didn't talk to anybody about it. I didn't look to find somebody else to talk about it. I heard my sister talking about her daughters all my life, so I didn't want to do that either. I could hear people getting tired of listening to her, so I didn't want to do that. Yes. With all the things that I teach, you know, you would think I would know, but we are the toughest on ourselves. I see that now. It's easier to look after somebody else than it is to look after yourself. Yes.

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

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

I lived in a little place there called Mannitowatch (ph), and the Native people there adopted me. They took me into their hearts and their homes, and they...
did a ceremony on me and gave me my Indian name, my
colours. And I went on a journey that brought me back
home. And from then on, the right teachers started coming
my way there, too.

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

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

I was pretty tough on my upbringing of my
daughters because I had residential school teachings in me,
and that is how I raised my kids: Through the residential
school teachings that I had. It wasn't very good. I was
very strict. Yes. And I went down that journey, too. And I drank lots and had done a lot of things that I'm not proud of. Those things that I'm not proud of were my biggest teachers. It made me wake up.

But I'm way beyond that now. But my daughter still has lots of resentments, but I can't. I can't fix it for her. You know, now that I understand a lot now, you know, I've learned a lot in my journey. And I understand where she's coming from. And she has every right to feel that way. And I know she's going to fix it.

I know we are. I just know it. I just have to give her some space.

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

I have a son and daughter from my second husband. And I had three daughters with my first husband. Very good men, both of them. They taught me lots. I have no regrets with them at all. And I went to them, and I
apologized to both of them. They're my best buddies today. So you know, we keep in touch. We have grandchildren and things like that. Things are really civil, and I like that.

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

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

But I don't judge her. I don't judge people now. I learned not to do that, you know. I don't judge people for their lifestyles anymore. That is just the way it is. That's how, you know, for me, if we had the right teachings, like, from day one, we would be so much healthier. Like, we're living in another culture that doesn't belong to us, and makes it very confusing.
It makes us lost, mixed up. It makes us want to pick up things that are not good for us. I see that in the people today. I see where all of that pain is coming from. So it's hard. You know, when you look at that, why do you want to put more pain on them by judging them? I don't know why they do that. I see it too often, people putting more by judging people. They are putting more pain. I don't want to feed that. I don't want to feed it.

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

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

But I have compassion now for the people that are there, the people that I had met there. That's a connection I have now all over the North now. All the
communities, we have that connection. That is what brings us together. That is one good thing that came out of it. Yes. And we all have a common goal now. We all want to get better. We want to get out of this. And I noticed today, people are calling each other "Aboriginal people," not Inuit, Dene -- Aboriginal people coming together.

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

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

Too much sitting at the desk. We're really being moolah (ph) people. That's what we call them: Moolah. You know, they are a different culture altogether. We don't sit behind a desk all day long. We're connected to mother earth. She draws us. We're just drawn to her. And it's difficult for our children to be sitting in a
school all day long like that, listening to people talk, talk, talk. Our way of life is not like that. We don't talk much. We just look at each other, and we know exactly what to do. All those good things that we want to bring back. So much good talk downstairs today about how - - not enough stories women are sharing. They are not being acknowledged, their stories. How the stories that they tell don't make a lot of sense; right? Elders tell stories, and it doesn't make sense to the children. So we have to put more detail into it, and I really agree with that.

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

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

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

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

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

And the government -- like, I have a little B&B in Lutselk'e (ph) and the lawyers come there and
stay at my house that are negotiating for the treaty. And I ask them out of curiosity, "How are the negotiations going?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

William was telling me how he builds up
his clients. He doesn't remind them that they have an
addiction. He doesn't remind them that their past is all —
— you know, he just builds from today. From today, you
leave the past out there. That's how -- I live like that today.

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

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

And those are the things that I want to take with me and share with the rest of the world, is what they taught me, all the good things. Even though they were in pain, they were always happy. Happy, happy girls all the time. Pretty. Oh, my gosh. That's the worst thing.
It's hard to be pretty because you know everybody wants you. Long-legged girls, both of them, Shelly and Janelle. That's why my daughter loved them so much. My daughter wasn't as pretty. She was a little short but strong, strong girl. She just loved her cousins so much. So she started to get pretty sick, anyway, after she was taking those pills. And there was nothing I could do for her. I realize now, you know, there is not much I could have done. I had done the best I could with what I knew. It was her choice. She was an adult.

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

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

I mean, the spirits just know what they're doing. They just send the right people. What a wise words.
l 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
7 It does. I know what I need to do now. I 
8 need to grieve. I've got to allow myself to grieve and to 
9 let her go. So they are already working on a sweat for me. 
10 They're working on a sweat for me, so I'm going to do a 
11 sweat. I'm taking care of my aftercare. I want to do 
12 anger management. And I want to do talking circles, and 
13 they really help me.
14
15 MS. KAM ANDERSON: You know, one thing, 
16 Ruth, that I am thinking. You are a helper and a healer. 
17 What would you say to somebody else? What would you say to 
18 your friend or someone you were healing? Are they any of 
19 the same things that you are thinking about for yourself? 
20 Or is it something totally different? You are tough, 
21 tough, tough all the time; right?
22
23 MS. RUTH MERCREDI: I know. Yes.
24
25 MS. KAM ANDERSON: I think about, sort of, 
26 it is maybe, not the opposite, but being vulnerable. You 
27 know, to grieve and to let some stuff go and to let 
28 yourself do what you need to do. For me, I sort of picture 
29 it as almost the opposite of being tough. Because tough is
like this and not letting in and not allowing it. But I do
not know if that has altogether worked for you. But yes.
What if you let yourself not be tough, or you did not have
to be tough?

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: I know.

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

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: That's what I say.

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

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

Like, sometimes your own journey -- you
get off a bit and then get back on when you need to and
when you're ready. Like, is that how it goes? Are you always right on? Or sometimes are you off for a bit, but that's okay. You can always jump back on; right?

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

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

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

MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Yes.

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

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

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

MS. KAM ANDERSON: And I am sorry if I am
jumping in too much.

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

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

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

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

MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Absolutely.

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

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

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: We're human.
MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Perfection does not exist.

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

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

And I think that kind of encouraged me, you know. So I just kind of kept up that tough girl act. And it was also working for my grieving. I would get really tough and say, "No. I let my daughter go."

Meanwhile, I needed more time to grieve. I needed that time maybe to talk about it with somebody. I never looked for that kind of -- for help. I never looked for it.
So I see now. Because I would expect somebody, if they lost somebody, to go look for help. I would tell them, "You know, you should go talk to somebody." Yes. I would do that. But not for myself, though. We're so hard on ourselves. But yes. I'm grateful. I'm grateful. Thank you for encouraging me to do this. It was you guys that did this, that encouraged me. Because I didn't really think I needed it, you know. I'm really happy for my sister too, you know, because we had a lot of losses. We both lost our parents at a very young age. And then we lost our brother and then our daughters. Oh, gosh, you know. It is quite a bit of stuff, isn't it? I never really looked at it that way because we're not the only ones that took so many losses. So many families that we know, you know. So I never really thought too much about it. But when I talk about it, I think, oh, gosh we went through a lot, our family. Yes.

We had stepfathers, too, and we had sex abuse in our family. And not very good. Sex abuse; watching our mother get beaten up; hiding knives in the middle of the night because people are drunk, and we know they're going to fight. So my [Family member] and I would hide all the knives and sharp things. And sometimes we would get up in the morning, and all the furniture is all
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Ruth Mercredi (Janelle, Shelly & Diane Mercredi)

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

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

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

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

I didn't know at that time where we were going. I was really spoiled rotten. My mother spoiled me. And I remember her -- she was disciplining me that day, and she was mad at me. So when the RCMP plane came and took us, I was just happy because my mom was mad at me, so I was
teaching her a lesson. I was going to go with these guys, and so what a mistake.

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

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

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

Well, then she just took her finger in it, and she tried to rip it off me. And she was dragging me all over because you can't rip wool. And so she was
dragging me all over the place in her little room there, pulling me around, trying to rip the sweater off me. It was just her and I there. Yes.

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

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

But we already have the effects of it because of my parents and my grandparents. So we already had the teachings of that. It was a rough one year. I was spoiled rotten, and I really paid for it. And I've watched other kids, too, being punished, and that's hard to watch. And there were some that were such little angels. So I was like, "I really want to try to be like that." So one year. That's all we spent there, me and Martha. So we were very
MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Ruth, you also mentioned that there have been some episodes of sexual abuse in your family. Is that something that you would like to share with us? What happened exactly?

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

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

And I forgave him before he went to the spirit world. I forgave him. But yes. And that wasn't the only incident. Like, we had people partying there, and we're trying to sleep, and guys would come and try to feel us up while we were in the bed. Me and my [Family member] would be sleeping together. Like, we would always kick
them. They would leave us alone, but a lot of that stuff went on. Lots of sex abuse and all kinds of abuse, fighting. That's how we were raised. There was a lot of that stuff.

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

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

I was doing really heavy drinking them days. I wasn't into too much drugs. I didn't care much for drugs. But alcohol was my vice. My nieces too. They were all sexually abused by people we trust. I can understand them going doing what they did. That's all they thought they were good for. I thought that of myself for a long time. I thought that's all I was good for.
It really does something to you when they
do that to you. It breaks your spirit. It makes you go
within. You are not out there. You're like this, wounded
people like that when they hurt you in your sacred space.
It's really hard. You think you're no good for nothing.
You're dirty. And that's the thing that you keep feeding.
I'm no good for nothing. What am I good for? That sex
abuse is killer.

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

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Never.

MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Never?

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

And she hung around where there's lots of
violence, down in the drag (ph), they call it, you know.
The only time I ever had the guts to go down the drag was
when I was drunk. I would never go down there when I was
sober. But my daughter was down there.
And she would go down there sober and come back drunk. And sometimes all beaten up and oh, my gosh. My poor girl. She's in a good place now. Since she's passed away, you know, I haven't worried about her. I haven't worried about her at all. I was getting a little bit of peace of mind right there, because I know she's in a good place now. Nobody is going to hurt her. It was always my biggest worry.

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

I've never been close to my second oldest. We didn't have that connection, you know. But I really wanted to. I wanted to work on that. I really do, because I'm not that same person anymore. I was a pretty strict mom. I know that. I was a lot easier on my second children than I was on my first. But I was really strict. Like, you know, with a belt because that's how we were -- we were strapped with a belt. And so that's how I did with my kids, too. I see now, today it's not the way to do it. My daughter has resentments about those things.
MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: And Ruth, we have been talking a lot and you were mentioning that the people need to go back to traditional teaching, and I find it really interesting. So if I had to ask you how to stop the violence against Indigenous women and girls, how to improve the situation, like, this is one recommendation. But would you have any other recommendations that you can give us to stop this cycle of violence that you are referring to? How can we improve the situation? How can the violence against Indigenous women and girls cease? What can be done to improve the situation? I know it's a really broad question.

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Yes. I know. I have so many things going on in my head. Where do I start? Well, for instance, like, now, they are speaking up. There is no more silence. Like, there still is, but people are starting to see. Like, you see in the news about all that sexual abuse. One person came out. Now every day, every day, every day. So I see that happening here. Happening here. It's going to hit the communities because people are already talking about it. Even if they're talking about it when they're drinking, that's a start. No more silence. And making people aware. We know that this is happening. And I even feel like even approaching these
people, telling them that, you know, we know what's happening. If you need help, we're willing to help you. Being upfront and honest. And I think more education on it, too, like, more awareness. Because when they see that, these abusers, they start to feel things and feeling guilty or shame or something to make them look at themselves so they can get help. Because right now, there's men's programs opening up now, more and more. More men are seeking help. And Mike Natalie (ph) or one of the MLAs from one of the Dogrib (ph) region, he abused his wife. And so he went to a program and got healing for himself. Now, I think that is really powerful to see a leader like that, that's been down that road, and now he's trying to heal himself from that. You know, things like that are so powerful when you see that. And William Greenland has a wonderful program there for men today. And I feel that it's time for the men and women to get together. We used to have women's circles. They didn't want men there. Men don't want women there. I think it's time now to start speaking to each other about how we're feeling to each other like that. To make more awareness, more openness, and so we're clear of what we want in the future, how we're going to heal, help each other. Because we're in this
together. We want our men to walk in balance with us. We
don't want to get rid of them or put them in jail. We want
them to be healthy and walk beside us because they're our
warriors. They take care of us women, even though we're
the boss. They're okay with that because they're warriors.
They know their place.

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

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

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

So we're trying to get that in there
somehow, our way of life, with a little bit more detail,
because sometimes the elders don't give too much detail.
And I said, well that comes with residential school, because they're only taught so much and then the rest, they put it away.

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

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

So we talk about other things -- interesting other things, make them feel comfortable with us first before we start attacking them. Healing is so important. I always say when you look at health, it says "heal" in it. So it's good to be healthy, mind, body, emotions, and spirit. Since we've been affected by residential school, we're just going mind; body, mind;
We're not even connected to our hearts.

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

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

The way you guys are running here -- are doing things here, that's what we want to see more of. People are caring. They're going to listen to us and not tell us how to do it, you know. We have been told that all our life. Pray to this one. You got to go to church. You can't do that. You can't be like that. Don't cry. Don't get angry. Here you guys are telling us, "Do all that."

And I really am grateful. I really am. And I really feel good. Yes, I do.
MS. MARIE-AUDREY GIRARD: Excellent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MS. RUTH MERCREDI: Oh, you were awesome.

--- Whereupon the statement concluded at 7:03 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