

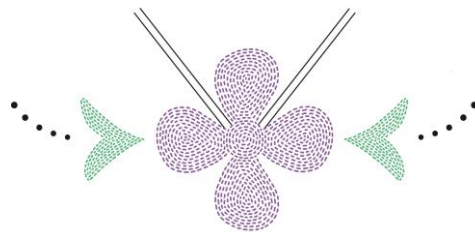
National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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 I Statement Gathering
Onion Lake Recreation Centre**

Onion Lake, Saskatchewan



PUBLIC

April 10, 2018

Statement - Volume 425

Toni Chief, In relation Jeanette Chief

Statement gathered by Kate Langham

Charest Reporting Services

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Documents submitted with testimony: none.

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April 10, 2018
Onion Lake, SK

(PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED AT 1:10 P.M.)

KATE LANGHAM: This is Kate Langham, statement gatherer for the national inquiry. It's April 10th, 2018, and we're here in Onion Lake, Saskatchewan, at the recreation centre. I'm here with ...

TONI CHIEF: Toni Chief.

KATE LANGHAM: Thank you for being here, Toni. So you can just start off by saying what it is that you want the commissioners to know.

TONI CHIEF: Okay.

KATE LANGHAM: Just take your time.

TONI CHIEF: My Auntie Jeanette was murdered [indiscernible]. And I was one of the last people that was with her the night before she went missing. I was sober and it was me -- I ran into her -- I was sober, drove for some people to town, and I ran into her in town. And she was talking to me in Cree saying some stuff about her children. How much she loved them and how she never wanted anything to happen to her.

So we went to the bar -- a bar called -- at that time it was called The Alberta. And I didn't drink all night because I had just got out of treatment. And something was off. I could feel it. That for some reason I had to just stop, watch what was going on around the people, the company we were with.

There was a wedding that night at Alkur [phonetic] a little truck stop not far from here, from Lloydminster, from here half way to Lloydminster. And she went with my Uncle Charles to go and check out the dads. So I stayed with my other friends. And she came back with the wedding party, and the wedding party came to the bar and whatever. She said she was going to go and play pool, and somebody brought us beer. I can't remember, but he was Caucasian. And I told him I didn't drink, but I thought I'll just take the beer and I will give it to my auntie, because the last time I saw her was at the pool table. So I took this beer, gave it to my friends, and when I looked up, she was gone. She wasn't

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1 there.

2 So because I was a sober driver, just waited
3 for her and waited and waited and waited.
4 Nobody. And I thought, well, I'm going to go
5 check again. So I jumped out of the vehicle and
6 I went to the bar. And the doors are already
7 closed so I went through the hotel. And I asked
8 the people there, the front desk people, if there
9 was a way to the back, and they said, no, it was
10 locked. So I went around to the back driving,
11 there was nobody. So we drove to the next bar
12 where I met her, the PC. There was nobody. She
13 was gone.

14 So I thought, well, maybe she just --
15 because she was staying at the PC at that time in
16 a room up there. Maybe she went home. So I went
17 to go and check but it was closed already. The
18 doors were locked. So I couldn't get in, into
19 the apartment part. So I left and went home.
20 Drove everybody home.

21 And then that was a Saturday. I'm pretty
22 sure it was a Monday or a Tuesday they said they
23 found the body. Monday, I think. And on the
24 Tuesday it was confirmed that it was her. She
25 was dead.

26 KATE LANGHAM: Approximately how old was Jeanette at the
27 time?

28 TONI CHIEF: I think she was -- I'm not even sure.
29 Maybe 39, 40, 41. She passed away just before
30 her birthday. On or just before her birthday.

31 KATE LANGHAM: June?

32 TONI CHIEF: June of 2009, I think.

33 KATE LANGHAM: June of 2009, okay. What was the
34 police response like?

35 TONI CHIEF: I'm not too sure because we had the
36 funeral -- I kind of -- I was kind of in a haze.
37 I don't really remember -- I just remember the
38 funeral and -- but I left with my other auntie
39 right away. Like, because I was in shock -- or I
40 was heartbroken.

41 KATE LANGHAM: Of course.

42 TONI CHIEF: So she took me to Canoe Lake with her
43 because she didn't want me to start drinking.

44 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah.

45 TONI CHIEF: And then I came home, back to Onion Lake
46 and she just told me to smudge and pray. I
47 remember I was home alone and I went outside and

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1 there was a [indiscernible]. And made some tea
2 and I sat outside and I made a fire. I just
3 cried or laid down. Our mother earth heard my
4 cried [sic]. And I asked her to forgive me. And
5 then I seen this green light in the sky. I
6 remember that. So I kind of took it as a sign
7 from her.
8 KATE LANGHAM: Beautiful.
9 TONI CHIEF: Yeah. But it was really hard to see her
10 kids, my cousins.
11 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah.
12 TONI CHIEF: Because I knew they had questions, and I
13 kind of felt like they blamed me. But then, I
14 blame myself for that because I didn't take care
15 of her.
16 KATE LANGHAM: How old were Jeanette's kids at the time?
17 TONI CHIEF: I don't know. I don't remember. They
18 were just young.
19 KATE LANGHAM: Adults or --
20 TONI CHIEF: Okay. Just young adults.
21 KATE LANGHAM: -- or young kids?
22 Okay. How has the family been coping?
23 TONI CHIEF: We're a big family. It's just -- because
24 we grew up with them, they're my neighbours, it
25 just split them apart. It just -- seeing them
26 get addicted to drugs and alcohol. I think
27 that's how we all coped was drugs and alcohol.
28 Yeah.
29 KATE LANGHAM: After that time, was your family
30 offered any supports by victim services or
31 counselling or community?
32 TONI CHIEF: I kind of don't remember because I
33 just -- I kept away from everybody. Oh, that's
34 what I was going to say. After I came home from
35 the funeral, that's when the cops came and took
36 my statement because I was sober. And that
37 investigator said that my name came up a lot from
38 people. And just asking what she was wearing and
39 I was kind of -- I don't know. It's been quite a
40 journey. It just happened.
41 KATE LANGHAM: Did the police ever have any leads or
42 any charges?
43 TONI CHIEF: In the beginning I didn't really -- I
44 don't know if I didn't want to know or I didn't
45 want to deal with it, but at that time I think
46 they did. And I didn't want to impose on my
47 cousins and ask stuff because I didn't want to

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1 bring it up for them.
2 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah.
3 TONI CHIEF: We did a walk for her for four years.
4 And for myself I know that I walked for my auntie
5 to find who did this to her.
6 KATE LANGHAM: Right. Did your family do anything
7 else to memorialize?
8 TONI CHIEF: They go every year to the site where she
9 was found.
10 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.
11 TONI CHIEF: I haven't gone.
12 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah.
13 TONI CHIEF: I just moved back home, so I didn't go to
14 any of the court things because they did find who
15 did it.
16 KATE LANGHAM: They did find who did it?
17 TONI CHIEF: He was charged. He was finally sentenced
18 in January.
19 KATE LANGHAM: Of this year?
20 TONI CHIEF: Yeah.
21 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.
22 TONI CHIEF: He killed two woman from here.
23 KATE LANGHAM: Okay. Was he from the community?
24 TONI CHIEF: No. Originally from Calgary, I think.
25 KATE LANGHAM: Okay. How have you coped?
26 TONI CHIEF: I think I'm just starting. Yeah, because
27 for a really long time I blamed myself.
28 KATE LANGHAM: Right. Right.
29 TONI CHIEF: I kept it, like -- it was just mine that
30 I couldn't share. And then every now and then I
31 would share with whoever I was with. Like, my
32 aunties, like, her sisters, I shared with them
33 that I was with her. And they were, like, What
34 you were? Yeah. Well, did she say anything?
35 You know, what happened? That was what I didn't
36 want was to have them ask questions I didn't have
37 answers for.
38 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah.
39 TONI CHIEF: What was the question?
40 KATE LANGHAM: Just how have you coped. Have there
41 been any supports or counselling or treatment,
42 or ...?
43 TONI CHIEF: I've gone to treatment. It's going to
44 be -- I've been sober -- while I was in treatment
45 last year, he plead not guilty and then the guy
46 plead guilty. I remember I was at home and I was
47 with my kids and, you know, the kids just stay

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1 home with me for a little while and help -- you
2 know, I told them I'm going to cry. And my
3 children know. So they stayed home with me and
4 lit sage and a candle for her and the other lady.
5 And the sense of relief that I had when he plead
6 guilty, I was laughing, I was crying, I was --
7 like, my son thought I was going crazy. But it
8 was just -- you know, it was, like, a relief.
9 And then I moved home and we had to go to
10 court, because I didn't go to any of the courts.
11 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.
12 TONI CHIEF: So we went to court in January, the
13 sentencing. So I wasn't there when they read a
14 lot of the gory details in this.
15 KATE LANGHAM: Yes.
16 TONI CHIEF: But there was some stuff and it hurt. He
17 brutalized her. I was just -- the pain that,
18 like, she probably went through. It was
19 [indiscernible].
20 When we were in court, he didn't even look
21 at us. He didn't even apologize. No remorse.
22 And then he had the nerve to ask the justice
23 system that -- to tell them that he was afraid
24 for his life. And he was sentenced. He had
25 nerve to be afraid for his life. I started my
26 healing journey, and I think this is the last
27 part I have to do.
28 KATE LANGHAM: We're so glad you're here today to
29 share this. Thank you for coming forward.
30 TONI CHIEF: I don't feel like -- I felt sorry for
31 him. I felt sorry for him. I don't have anymore
32 anger towards him. Like, once I finally was able
33 to put a face to the name, because all my other
34 family was able to see him almost -- I don't know
35 about some of her sons and -- now I know she's at
36 peace now.
37 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah. Was your family offered any
38 supports during the court process?
39 TONI CHIEF: Yeah.
40 KATE LANGHAM: They were?
41 TONI CHIEF: I wasn't around, though, but some of my
42 family was, yeah.
43 KATE LANGHAM: Do you know what kind, or ...?
44 TONI CHIEF: I know they went to some of the missing
45 and murdered inquiries like Saskatoon. I know
46 they went to that one.
47 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah.

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1 TONI CHIEF: I'm not too sure about what else they
2 received.
3 KATE LANGHAM: But they did have some supports there?
4 TONI CHIEF: Yeah.
5 KATE LANGHAM: What was Jeanette like? What kind of
6 person was Jeanette?
7 TONI CHIEF: She was beautiful. I used to work with
8 her in town. And she was bubbly. She liked to
9 laugh and joke around. She always used to tell
10 us how much she loved her kids. Every time I
11 talked to my auntie, she always -- all the time
12 said how much she loved her kids. She was fun.
13 She was loving. She was kind. I never remember
14 her getting mad. Just when we were younger when
15 we weren't listening.
16 But as I got older I don't ever remember her
17 being angry with anybody. And just small -- she
18 was just a tiny little thing.
19 KATE LANGHAM: Is there anything that you would like
20 to do to memorialize Jeanette or any of the other
21 women?
22 TONI CHIEF: No, I think we do it every year in our
23 community with the missing and murdered women.
24 On October 4th, I think, we have a walk -- a
25 REDress walk, I think. And this is the first
26 year that I have been home, so this year I really
27 participated. We went up on the hill and we put
28 the red dresses up. Where I work with Onion Lake
29 justice, we have the red dresses hanging. We
30 have a poster for them with all the ones that
31 have been missing and murdered.
32 For myself, once I learned about the REDress
33 Project, it's something that I am really
34 interested in is just -- like, always just having
35 a red dress and taking pictures of it. It's
36 nice. It's beautiful.
37 KATE LANGHAM: Where have you taken some pictures?
38 TONI CHIEF: I haven't taken any yet.
39 KATE LANGHAM: Just plans?
40 TONI CHIEF: Yeah. Yeah, so I think about her every
41 day, though.
42 KATE LANGHAM: She sounds like a beautiful person.
43 TONI CHIEF: She was, yeah. She was always a teaser.
44 She always used to tease me too and the kids.
45 KATE LANGHAM: Do you have any recommendations for the
46 commissioners moving forward?
47 TONI CHIEF: Just to keep offering supports to

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1 families to allow them -- their voices to be
2 heard so that they can heal and move on and to --
3 there's so many of them, there's so many missing
4 and murdered women, aboriginal women. It's like
5 an epidemic, and it makes me worried for my
6 daughters. I don't want them growing up in fear.
7 I don't want them to be, you know, like, to be
8 scared of men. So I don't know. Just to have
9 the supports for the families. And I know
10 there's, like, so many old cases out there that
11 maybe this, you know, like, answers the questions
12 that can't be answered. But not let them be
13 forgotten.

14 KATE LANGHAM: You mentioned you don't want your kids
15 growing up in fear. What do we need to do
16 differently for the young ones coming up?

17 TONI CHIEF: Educate them. For myself, I have taught
18 my daughters to listen to their instincts, their
19 spirit keepers. If you don't feel right, get
20 away. Like, they already don't trust Caucasian
21 men, you know. And I have tried to explain to
22 them too, you know, they're not all like that,
23 you know. But still they just have a fear of
24 men. So they have been pretty sheltered. But
25 they're grown up now, so ...

26 KATE LANGHAM: Did you raise them not in community?

27 TONI CHIEF: Yeah, I raised them --

28 KATE LANGHAM: You raised them here?

29 TONI CHIEF: Yeah.

30 KATE LANGHAM: Okay.

31 TONI CHIEF: They're on their own now, though. They
32 live in Lethbridge. School and work.

33 KATE LANGHAM: Do you have any other suggestions about
34 how we can keep our young girls or women safe?

35 TONI CHIEF: Not to feel targeted. Not to feel
36 targeted. Not to live in fear because we're
37 giving our power away if we're constantly living
38 in fear. To have faith. Faith over fear.

39 KATE LANGHAM: And what helps you with faith over
40 fear?

41 TONI CHIEF: What helps me, like, spiritually?

42 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah, what do you draw upon?

43 TONI CHIEF: My faith and creator. He has given me so
44 many blessings in my life. And knowing for
45 myself, starting to know who I really am and --
46 as a woman, a First Nations woman, that I am a
47 gift. And I do have gifts to offer. And not to

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1 give my power away. That's mine and it's to be
2 shared and not taken. I won't live in fear.
3 Like, I still don't trust, but I'm not going to
4 live in fear. I'm not going to be a target.

5 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah. Is there anything else while we
6 have this time together that you want known or
7 that you want us to know about?

8 TONI CHIEF: That it needs to stop. I said that.
9 There was a lot of trauma in our lives as First
10 Nations people and women. And that makes us more
11 susceptible to -- there's a lot of them living
12 high risk lifestyles. And they just need more
13 support in communities and First Nations to know
14 that people love them; they are cared about.
15 Those supports need to be there. Wellness
16 centres, aftercare centres, counsellors, more
17 youth groups. And stuff like this, like you guys
18 coming out to our community. Yeah, that kind of
19 stuff [indiscernible]. Somebody is listening to
20 us.

21 KATE LANGHAM: What kind of things here do you have
22 here in Onion Lake?

23 TONI CHIEF: We have a wellness centre, we have an
24 Ekweskeet Healing Lodge, which is a treatment
25 centre. Onion Lake needs an aftercare centre.
26 We really do because I can only speak for myself
27 when I was an alcoholic, an addict, to come home
28 and to have that stigma of, oh my God everybody
29 knows. Oh my God, do I belong here? No, I don't
30 belong here. Just feeling kind of ashamed but
31 nobody knowing your story. Like, I wish I could
32 have just came home, but I went to treatment and
33 to an aftercare centre but in a big city in
34 Calgary. It wasn't First Nations run or
35 anything. But I already knew there -- like, I
36 need to go home. I have to go home. I need to
37 go home. That's where I belong. But I would
38 have liked to be able to go for treatment to an
39 aftercare centre.

40 And another thing I noticed that two women
41 that are in treatment are coming out of
42 institutions, there's no all-woman's treatment
43 centre in Saskatchewan that I know of. And there
44 needs to be ones that are longer than 30 days,
45 29 days. Like, to really actually dig at that
46 stuff to get it out. Because especially where I
47 work I see a lot of people coming out of jail,

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1 and you're happy for them, they look good, they
2 look healthy. But they just -- well, where do I
3 go? Where do I stay? A lot of them don't have a
4 place to stay, so go to Lloyd and they just end
5 up back in the addictions and alcohol. I really
6 believe an aftercare centre would help.
7 Because I think -- we basically have
8 everything else except that. Like, a safe place
9 where you're able to stay. Because they -- like,
10 they can have family, but somebody is going to
11 be -- you don't know what's going on in that
12 home, so ...
13 KATE LANGHAM: Yeah. Those are really good --
14 TONI CHIEF: Thank you.
15 KATE LANGHAM: -- really good recommendations and
16 suggestions.
17 TONI CHIEF: Thank you. Because everybody -- I was
18 about -- well, the drinking and the drugging,
19 and, you know, well, what do you do -- it's like
20 what do you do with after. It's like you're
21 ripping a Band-Aid off and you need to make
22 sure -- you know, because a healing journey is a
23 long time. It's not just -- it's forever. There
24 is always going to be stuff that comes up,
25 especially with trauma.
26 KATE LANGHAM: Yes. Anything else while we have got
27 this time?
28 TONI CHIEF: No.
29 KATE LANGHAM: No? Okay. Well, it's 1:41. And that
30 concludes this public statement. Thank you very
31 much.
32 TONI CHIEF: Thank you.
33

(PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED AT 1:41 P.M.)

REPORTER'S CERTIFICATION

I, Alyssa Fontaine, Official Reporter in the Province of British Columbia, Canada, do hereby certify:

That the proceedings were taken down by me in shorthand at the time and place herein set forth and thereafter transcribed, and the same is a true and correct and complete transcript of said proceedings to the best of my skill and ability.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto subscribed my name this 7th day of June, 2018.

Alyssa Fontaine
Official Reporter