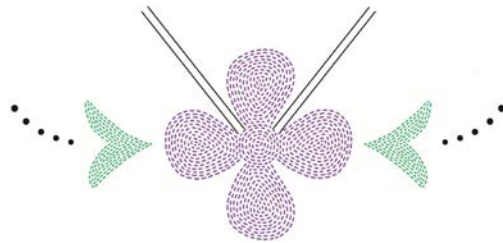


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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
Holiday Inn
La Ronge, Saskatchewan**



PUBLIC

Thursday October 18, 2018

Statement - Volume 522

Tom M. Charles,

In relation to Marjorie Roberts-Erickson

**Statement gathered by Francine Merasty,
Commission Counsel**

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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: Francine Merasty,
Commission Counsel

Documents submitted with testimony: none.

Tom M. Charles

(Marjorie Roberts-Erickson)

1 La Ronge, Saskatchewan

2 --- Upon commencing on Thursday, October 18, 2018.

3 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Okay, this is
4 Francine Merasty with the Inquiry, and I am sitting here
5 with Tom M. Charles, who's going to be sharing his
6 statement on Marjorie Roberts --

7 **MS. [E.H.]:** Erickson.

8 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** -- his aunt. Tom,
9 you're here to voluntarily give your statement in the
10 matter of your aunt, Marjorie Roberts-Erickson. And
11 present with us in the room is Tom and [E.H.]. Tom, your
12 statement will be audio recorded today, and you've also
13 allowed us to videotape your statement. Can you please
14 confirm that you agree with this?

15 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** I agree with that.

16 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Okay, what do you
17 want share with the Inquiry Tom?

18 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** You know I don't know
19 where to start with. But Marjorie, my aunt, her last --
20 married name was Erickson, and she was a Roberts to the
21 family. And she married a guy named [Husband], and they
22 lived in various locations. But the last time she was
23 known to be anywhere was in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.
24 And they lived in Nordel area in a little white house. I
25 attended that house a number of times, and visited her and

Tom M. Charles**(Marjorie Roberts-Erickson)**

1 things like that.

2 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** How far is Nordel
3 from La Ronge?

4 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** Two hundred and twenty-
5 three kilometres.

6 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** And was it close to
7 Prince Albert?

8 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** It's across the bridge
9 from Prince Albert.

10 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Okay.

11 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** And -- where was I?
12 Anyway, we would visit her there at her place, and there
13 was a lot of alcohol going on in there at the time. There
14 were times that there was no alcohol, she was sober. She
15 had Coke and things like that. She's look after the --
16 look after us when she can, in her way I guess. [Husband]
17 kind of stayed to himself, and I didn't realize until in
18 the future, in the future that he was very abusive to my
19 aunt. I was young at the time, going to school in Prince
20 Albert. I went to school at Riverside High School in the
21 1970s when she disappeared, and it was by word of mouth
22 that I found out that she went missing.

23 The storyline I got was they walked from the
24 National Hotel -- they went shopping in town for groceries,
25 and then they went to the bar at the National Hotel. Then

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1 they walked along the riverbank to the bridge. The only
2 bridge available was the railroad bridge. On both sides of
3 the bridge was a, a pedestrian -- not pedestrian but
4 vehicle traffic area. The north traffic coming into Prince
5 Albert would be on the west side of the road, and the other
6 one's on the east side. They were building the Diefenbaker
7 Bridge. Then what I understand was that she accidentally
8 fell -- they were walking across the railroad tracks and
9 she accidentally fell in the river, is the story that I was
10 told. And her grocery bags, brown paper bags, were on the
11 railroad tracks.

12 And I was too small to do anything about it
13 in a sense of helping with the search. It was in the
14 springtime because there was ice on the -- melting ice on
15 the river. And 1970 would have been basically my first
16 year at Riverside type of thing, and still going to school
17 at the Residence. And kind of thinking back on it, what I
18 was told -- and there was a lady with [Husband] and her
19 walking across the railroad tracks, the bridge, and then
20 she falls off accidentally. I walked that bridge. There's
21 no way that she can accidentally fall into the bridge. The
22 railroad ties wouldn't allow you to fall through the
23 railroad tracks into the bridge -- into the water, they're
24 too narrow.

25 So she would have to put her grocery bags

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1 down, jump over the railroad track guardrail, for the train
2 guardrail I guess, and then cross the roadway for the
3 traffic, and then jump off another rail to accidentally
4 drop into the river. And in a funny way, my own way, kind
5 of thinking about it I said that must have been a hell of a
6 trip. She trips over one railing, and then jumps over a
7 rail, trips over another railing to get into the river.

8 The grocery bags were supposed to have been
9 there with her stuff still in it, and -- somebody's
10 serenading me right now. So the bridge -- having all the,
11 you know -- I just want to -- I'll come back to it, but she
12 had all these children, small house, abusive husband, and
13 she had no escape plan. What was keeping her there was her
14 kids versus my mom, my personal mom. And why I say that,
15 she was kept there because of her kids.

16 In our case, my family case, was that mom
17 decided to leave my dad. He was an abusive alcoholic. Mom
18 at the time didn't drink, but she finally started drinking.
19 She succumbed to that drinking. And she wasn't at home
20 when the bus showed up. The guy came to the house and put
21 us on a bus, going to the student residence. This is in
22 1963. Why '63? Because that's when Kennedy was shot and I
23 seen it on TV, it was a big news item.

24 And the residential school survival thing, I
25 made a statement on that. The person, the adjudicator I

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1 guess, didn't believe, didn't believe me. So I had less
2 years on that.

3 So pretty much when I finished Grade 12 I
4 seen mom. She had left my dad, but she had lived with a
5 number of other men, and she was an alcoholic. And
6 graduation for me was for me to see my mom. Things
7 happened there but -- I hated my mom for the residence. I
8 had to be the adult, I had to look after my [Brother],
9 [E.H.], sisters, [Sister 2], [Sister 3], [Sister 4], the
10 whole extended family. I got into a couple of fights
11 there, I lost them. But I hated my mom because what she
12 did.

13 And in Grade 12 graduation -- I want to get
14 back to it because I asked her why. And then she told me I
15 was leaving your dad because he beat me, and because I
16 loved you guys, and I wanted you guys to get an education.
17 I didn't realize that was the first time she ever shared
18 that with me.

19 Marjorie being held back by her kids,
20 abusive husband, alcohol involved a lot. She had no avenue
21 of escape. It -- I don't know if [Husband] killed her, I
22 don't know if that other lady that was with them from the
23 Paynton Reserve killed her, but that other lady -- my
24 grandmother had told me that that other lady had Marjorie's
25 jacket on a couple of days after, wearing it. Did she get

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1 it from the house, was she staying with [Husband], I don't
2 know.

3 What I want is answers, I want the City
4 police to release the file, the investigation that they
5 did, or any investigation. I'd like to do a memorial thing
6 for Marjorie. Not only myself but the whole family, the
7 whole extended family to be there. I want [Aunt] to be
8 there, my other aunt. I want my uncles, the surviving
9 uncles to be there.

10 And the way my sister was talking about
11 going back to her childhood, trying to release your
12 emotions and things like that, we have lost loved ones too,
13 on a personal thing. And at the trap line at the cabin,
14 that homestead there is -- we can go back 300 years.
15 That's how long we've had that place. And we have ashes
16 out there of other loved ones.

17 I'd like to do something to honour my aunt,
18 honour the remaining family members. Yes, there is a lot
19 of alcohol in our family in that timeframe. Today I don't
20 drink. It's been 40-some years I haven't drank. My wife
21 don't drink. The girls, my daughters, four daughters,
22 occasionally probably drink, I don't know. It's their
23 life, their personal life. And they have kids too.

24 So I always tell that story in 19 -- I
25 believe in 1979 there was a kid missing just out of PA, and

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1 it was on the radio. Jack Sammon (ph) was talking about
2 it. And I drove out there to offer to help, realizing the
3 pain that the family's going through, of losing somebody,
4 missing somebody. Where is this kid? And this was going
5 on three or four days already.

6 So going out there, having a little bit of
7 bush skills, and by that evening I had located the kid. He
8 was -- his IQ wasn't very high, a big boy. So when I
9 hollered at him he took off on me because I'm a total
10 stranger. And I had to get the police dog to come in, RCMP
11 dog to knock the kid down to, to secure him and to bring
12 him back.

13 So every time to this day I've looked for my
14 sisters that also went missing a couple of days. It's
15 hard. To this day I've done -- I was asked to write it
16 down one time, to write all the names and things I've
17 thought were -- I've searched. It was 283 as of the other
18 day. That one in Prince Albert, from up north, from Black
19 Lake, a young man. We found him but he was dead, had
20 passed on.

21 I hate seeing another family suffer the way
22 we've suffered. Not knowing, not knowing where my aunt is.
23 To this day every time I see a woman, what Marjorie would
24 have looked like and I put age on her face, I want to go
25 and ask hi, are you Marjorie, are you Marjorie Roberts? I

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1 want to go say that to them. There's always that hope,
2 what about if she did runaway? But I don't think so, I
3 think she's dead, she's in the river. And there's rumours
4 that she might be buried in Nordel, but I think she's in
5 the river and she's passed on. But I want to do something
6 nice for her, and also for myself.

7 It's -- I don't know how to say it. I want
8 closure, I want closure to say this is the report by the
9 police, city police at the time, and this is what we did.
10 To know that they investigated it, to know that they just
11 didn't write it down and say missing person, drunk missing
12 person. To know that they did something at that time.

13 [Husband] was a white guy. Marjorie was a
14 very beautiful woman. And over the years of all the
15 searches I've done in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, when
16 we talk about Aboriginal women, Métis people, women, girls,
17 way back when the railroad was coming in across Canada, the
18 Aboriginal women were the exotic breed. Many people chased
19 them, many people hurt them, many people abused them.

20 During the railroad time it was the Oriental
21 women, the Asian women. And lately it was the Filipino
22 women, the more exotic women. A lot of these guys are
23 married guys, they have their own children, they have their
24 own girlfriends that do this. I have a number of them in
25 jail, so I can talk about it like that. But now we're back

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1 to the -- but we're now back to the native women. They
2 look exotic, they look easy prey, and the lifestyle we've
3 got. I think the third generation for residential school
4 stuff. When will that break? I don't know when it will
5 break, but I talk to my daughters about it. And I've been
6 very fortunate. The woman I married, she never went
7 through that. And very fortunate over 40-some years that
8 she's been with me and she brought the girls up, my -- our
9 daughters in her way. I would have failed.

10 So where is Marjorie? I don't know. I just
11 think she's in the river. I'd like to sleep one night
12 without having to think about her. She was -- to me she
13 was my aunt. So every time I look for a woman she's my
14 aunt, my mom, my grandma, my daughter, my child. Thank you
15 very much.

16 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** So you're done? Do
17 you want to ask -- do you want me to ask some questions?

18 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** Yeah, ask me some
19 questions.

20 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Okay.

21 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** I'm 204 years old.

22 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Okay, how do you --
23 what recommendations can you make to the National Inquiry
24 to make, to make it better for indigenous women for future,
25 in the future?

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1 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** What do you mean by
2 better?

3 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Like maybe to have
4 more resources for mental health, like shelters, or even --
5 like a lot of people say that there's no resources, like
6 when people go missing, they don't know who to contact.

7 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** Yeah, okay. I have an
8 idea what you're -- the question. I hope I don't have it
9 wrong. The Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women's Association in,
10 I guess in Saskatchewan here, and also with the FSI, they
11 made an attempt after Tamra Keepness went missing, to train
12 each of the 73 Bands to have a reacting for search and
13 rescue. To go out on call when somebody goes missing. It
14 doesn't have to be an Aboriginal woman, it could be a Band
15 member, it could be somebody else in the community.
16 Community work, community spirit type of thing.

17 So if we want to talk about the Aboriginal
18 women concept, let's build search teams. Not only the
19 male, but also female members. In our group we have female
20 members. Lately the Prince Albert Grand Council, and the
21 FSI, and through Protective Services, they have
22 organizations like that. But we need more funding, or we
23 need somebody to say let's train these people, let's train
24 them how to do the search, and give them the equipment to
25 search. And once they can do their own searches and that,

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1 leave them alone, let them be, let them do what they want
2 to do.

3 A lot of times too much red tape, you know
4 we only search for three days. Start searching 48 hours or
5 24 hours after somebody goes reported missing. We don't do
6 that, we don't wait no more. It's a bunch of false, false
7 policy about having to wait.

8 The only thing as a male, grandfather I
9 guess, and husband, is to talk with your kids, with your
10 young girls, with your young men. There's a lot of young
11 men getting killed too, disappearing. And I wish my sister
12 would quit distracting me with her phone. Talk to your
13 girls. This is the cycle. If you are drinking, it might
14 be innocent. If you drink, you come home, you go out with
15 your girlfriend, go have a drink, come home. But one of
16 these times you're going to meet somebody there. It's
17 going to be a female that's going to offer you to come to a
18 party, and we'll get you home. That happens a couple of
19 times, three or four times. And then when you're under the
20 influence of alcohol, she introduces you to drugs.

21 After she introduce you to drugs, you still
22 do that party scene. You're getting into wilder parties
23 and more drugs are being pushed onto you. Then the person
24 that's in charge of those girls -- they usually have a
25 number of girls that do that. They select somebody, a

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1 female, then they've got the girls working that girl.

2 Then they ask you to pay for all the drugs
3 that you've used. You have no way of paying because you're
4 stoned, you're dependent on those drugs. I can't pay you,
5 I'm not paying you. Then you get a lickin'. Not by the
6 guy, by the girls. Then you say I have to pay before I get
7 another lickin', I hate pain. How can I possibly pay? The
8 guy says well, we'll get you clothes, we'll get you makeup,
9 we'll put you on the streets, but you can't come home --
10 you leave around midnight, you don't come home without 500
11 bucks in your pocket, or \$300 in your pocket. Now you're
12 caught into that system.

13 When you get a beating -- it could be an
14 accident, too aggressive, they kill you. Now they have to
15 hide your body. Where do they put your body, the same
16 location where they put the other bodies. These people are
17 not idiots. If they had means and ways to make money in --
18 in proper society business world type of thing, they'd be
19 billionaires.

20 So we need the resources, we need to talk to
21 our kids. Get somebody who will talk to your kids that's
22 been through the -- I love to see a scared straight program
23 times two. For women, young girls and also for young guys.
24 Visit a jail, visit the correction centre, visit the
25 Pinegrove, visit the women's jail. Lock them up for a

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1 night. Take them to where there's a lot of drugs being
2 used, visit those sites with of course security with them
3 and things like that, to see. Get them to smell it, to see
4 it, to hear it, to taste it.

5 So there's probably people smarter than me
6 that we can ask or give good answers to. But this is my
7 gut feeling. For ourselves in this area, we're very
8 fortunate we have the lakes and the bush and the land that
9 we can escape to, to do our thing out there. Fish, hunt,
10 trap. They don't have those things down south. Any more
11 questions? You're falling asleep on me.

12 **MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Alright, well it's
13 5:49 p.m. on October 18th, and we're done with the
14 statement.

15 **MR. TOM CHARLES:** Thank you very much for
16 listening.

17 --- Upon adjourning at 5:49 p.m.

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Sherry Hobe, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.



Sherry Hobe

November 4, 2018