National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part I Statement Gathering
Holiday Inn
La Ronge, Saskatchewan

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

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Statement Gatherer: Francine Merasty,
Commission Counsel

Documents submitted with testimony: none.
--- Upon commencing on Thursday, October 18, 2018.

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

MS. [E.H.]: Erickson.

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

MR. TOM CHARLES: I agree with that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Okay.

**MR. TOM CHARLES:** And -- where was I?

Anyway, we would visit her there at her place, and there was a lot of alcohol going on in there at the time. There were times that there was no alcohol, she was sober. She had Coke and things like that. She's look after the -- look after us when she can, in her way I guess. [Husband] kind of stayed to himself, and I didn't realize until in the future, in the future that he was very abusive to my aunt. I was young at the time, going to school in Prince Albert. I went to school at Riverside High School in the 1970s when she disappeared, and it was by word of mouth that I found out that she went missing.

The storyline I got was they walked from the National Hotel -- they went shopping in town for groceries, and then they went to the bar at the National Hotel. Then
they walked along the riverbank to the bridge. The only bridge available was the railroad bridge. On both sides of the bridge was a, a pedestrian -- not pedestrian but vehicle traffic area. The north traffic coming into Prince Albert would be on the west side of the road, and the other one's on the east side. They were building the Diefenbaker Bridge. Then what I understand was that she accidentally fell -- they were walking across the railroad tracks and she accidentally fell in the river, is the story that I was told. And her grocery bags, brown paper bags, were on the railroad tracks.

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

So she would have to put her grocery bags
down, jump over the railroad track guardrail, for the train
guardrail I guess, and then cross the roadway for the
traffic, and then jump off another rail to accidentally
drop into the river. And in a funny way, my own way, kind
of thinking about it I said that must have been a hell of a
trip. She trips over one railing, and then jumps over a
rail, trips over another railing to get into the river.

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

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

And the residential school survival thing, I
made a statement on that. The person, the adjudicator I
guess, didn't believe, didn't believe me. So I had less
years on that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

So I always tell that story in 19 -- I believe in 1979 there was a kid missing just out of PA, and
it was on the radio. Jack Sammon (ph) was talking about it. And I drove out there to offer to help, realizing the pain that the family's going through, of losing somebody, missing somebody. Where is this kid? And this was going on three or four days already.

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

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

I hate seeing another family suffer the way we've suffered. Not knowing, not knowing where my aunt is. To this day every time I see a woman, what Marjorie would have looked like and I put age on her face, I want to go and ask hi, are you Marjorie, are you Marjorie Roberts? I
want to go say that to them. There's always that hope, what about if she did runaway? But I don't think so, I think she's dead, she's in the river. And there's rumours that she might be buried in Nordel, but I think she's in the river and she's passed on. But I want to do something nice for her, and also for myself.

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

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

During the railroad time it was the Oriental women, the Asian women. And lately it was the Filipino women, the more exotic women. A lot of these guys are married guys, they have their own children, they have their own girlfriends that do this. I have a number of them in jail, so I can talk about it like that. But now we're back
to the -- but we're now back to the native women. They look exotic, they look easy prey, and the lifestyle we've got. I think the third generation for residential school stuff. When will that break? I don't know when it will break, but I talk to my daughters about it. And I've been very fortunate. The woman I married, she never went through that. And very fortunate over 40-some years that she's been with me and she brought the girls up, my -- our daughters in her way. I would have failed.

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

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

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

**MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Okay.

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

**MS. FRANCINE MERASTY:** Okay, how do you -- what recommendations can you make to the National Inquiry to make, to make it better for indigenous women for future, in the future?
MR. TOM CHARLES: What do you mean by better?

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

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

So if we want to talk about the Aboriginal women concept, let's build search teams. Not only the male, but also female members. In our group we have female members. Lately the Prince Albert Grand Council, and the FSI, and through Protective Services, they have organizations like that. But we need more funding, or we need somebody to say let's train these people, let's train them how to do the search, and give them the equipment to search. And once they can do their own searches and that,
Tom M. Charles  
(Marjorie Roberts-Erickson)

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

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

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

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

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

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

So we need the resources, we need to talk to our kids. Get somebody who will talk to your kids that's been through the -- I love to see a scared straight program times two. For women, young girls and also for young guys. Visit a jail, visit the correction centre, visit the Pinegrove, visit the women's jail. Lock them up for a
night. Take them to where there's a lot of drugs being
used, visit those sites with of course security with them
and things like that, to see. Get them to smell it, to see
it, to hear it, to taste it.

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

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

MR. TOM CHARLES: Thank you very much for
listening.

--- 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.

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Sherry Hobe

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Sherry Hobe
November 4, 2018