IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

IN THE MATTER OF:

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

- V -

RUSSELL MICHAEL SIKYEA

Transcript of the Reasons for Sentence by The Honourable Justice L. A. Charbonneau, sitting in Hay River, in the Northwest Territories, on the 20th day of February, 2013.

APPEARANCES:

Ms. D. Vaillancourt: Counsel for the Crown

Mr. T. Boyd: Counsel for the Defence

Charge under s. 348(1)(b) Criminal Code of Canada

INITIALS USED TO PROTECT THE IDENTITY OF THE COMPLAINANT BAN ON PUBLICATION PURSUANT TO S. 486.4 CRIMINAL CODE

1	THE	COURT: Earlier today I found
2		Mr. Sikyea guilty of break and enter and sexual
3		assault, and now I have to decide what sentence
4		should be imposed for this offence. I summarized
5		the key aspects of the evidence in my reasons
6		for decision earlier today, but I will repeat
7		the facts that I found as part of my decision
8		so that my sentencing decision is placed in

proper context.

The complainant at the time of these
events lived in an apartment in a residential
complex in Fort Smith. She lived with her
common-law spouse, but he worked at the mine
on a two-weeks-in and two-weeks-out shift.
The weekend that this incident happened he was
out at the mine. His sister M. was staying
with the complainant, something that according
to the complainant was not unusual.

The complainant, M., and another friend spent part of the day on September 11th, 2011, drinking. They were celebrating M.'s birthday. They drank beer and vodka at the complainant's home. They then went to a bar in Fort Smith. The complainant was getting tired so she did not stay at the bar very long. She returned home, and sometime later M. returned to her apartment as well.

The accused had also been drinking at various places that day. He was on his way to another house where he believed there was a party going on, and he walked through the residential complex where the complainant's apartment is. There he came into contact with the complainant and M. I accept their evidence that he knocked on the door of the apartment, and when they answered he told them about the party that he was going to. M. wanted to go to this party, the complainant did not, so she stayed home.

The offender stayed at this other house for a period of time, and then he left and he returned to the complainant's home. My findings at trial were that he was not invited inside but made his way inside while the complainant was sleeping on the couch. She barely knew him at the time and in fact needed some assistance to identify him the following day. He was not invited in her home.

He took her pants and panties off and started having intercourse with her. She woke up during this and started struggling. She said he was pinning her arms and at one point had his hand on her mouth. She was screaming at him to stop, but he continued. Eventually the assault

1 ended and he left.

The evidence was somewhat unclear as to exactly what happened next and in what order, but sometime the next day the complainant did tell M. and others what had happened. She was not intending to do anything about it, but M. encouraged her to do something. They went to the house where M. and Mr. Sikyea had gone the previous night to confirm the identity of the person who had been there with M.

Later they went to the Health Centre and the police were contacted. The complainant underwent a sexual assault examination, which took about two hours. Samples were seized from her and were analyzed. The result of forensic and DNA testing confirmed the presence of semen, which was later matched to the accused; in other words, establishing that there had been sexual contact between the two.

Mr. Sikyea was not arrested right away.

Police looked for him at various residences in

Fort Smith and they eventually obtained a warrant

for his arrest. They issued a press release to

advise the community that Mr. Sikyea was subject

to an arrest warrant and that the police were

looking for him. Two weeks later Mr. Sikyea

contacted the police essentially turning himself

1 in.

He has been in custody since his arrest on September 25th, 2011, which is five days short of 17 months. He had a show cause hearing a few days after he was arrested and he was ordered detained. The Warrant of Committal was endorsed showing that he was detained primarily because of his criminal record, and this means under the Criminal Code that I do not have any discretion to grant him credit for pre-trial custody on a ratio higher than one day for each day spent on remand.

Parliament decided to curtail the discretion of trial judges as far as how much credit can be given for remand time. I understand the submission made by defence counsel, that it does not appear in doing so that Parliament took into account the fact that prisoners on remand do not earn remission. But there is no longer any room to take that factor into account when a person is detained primarily because of their criminal record.

As I mentioned in my ruling on the Corbett application, in referring to the fact that it is still part of the Evidence Act that an accused person can be cross-examined on his or her criminal record, in our system of law, subject

to constitutional considerations, the law-making
role belongs to Parliament and not the Courts.

I think it would be circumventing the role of
Parliament for me to reduce a sentence that
I would otherwise impose so as to indirectly
give more credit for Mr. Sikyea for his remand
time than what I am entitled to do under the
existing provisions of the Criminal Code.

The starting point for any sentencing has to be the principles and purpose of sentencing that are set out in the Criminal Code, Section 718 and the following sections.

I have considered those sections this afternoon, although I do not propose to quote them all.

I will refer only specifically to the fundamental principle of sentencing, which is proportionality. A sentence should be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender.

The gravity of the offence is determined by the facts of the case, but it is also determined in part by how the law treats it. What I mean by this is that the objective seriousness of an offence is shown by the type of sentence that the law says is available for it. The maximum sentence available for break and enter and commit

an indictable offence is life imprisonment,

obviously a significant sentence.

The invasion of a person's home has always been treated by this Court as an aggravating factor, and by other Courts as well. Now under certain circumstances it is a statutorily recognized aggravating factor under Section 348.1 of the Criminal Code. That provision applies here because Mr. Sikyea knew that the dwelling-house was occupied and he committed an offence of sexual assault, a crime that is inherently violent.

Even without the break and enter aspect the objective seriousness of the crime of sexual assault, standing alone, is also reflected by the maximum penalty that can be imposed for that offence, which is ten years. Sexual assault on its own is also an objectively very serious crime.

The Courts in this jurisdiction have long recognized that sexually assaulting someone by having forced intercourse with them is a very serious type of sexual assault, one where the offender's moral blameworthiness is high, because that type of offence shows the complete and blatant disregard for the personal integrity and dignity of the person assaulted.

For this type of serious sexual assault
this Court and our Court of Appeal have
repeatedly stated that the starting point in
sentencing should be three years imprisonment.
This is not a minimum sentence, it is simply
a starting point that reflects the seriousness
of the offence and the moral blameworthiness
of those who commit it, and from the starting
point the sentence must be adjusted to reflect
whatever mitigating or aggravating circumstances
exist.

Obviously when such a serious sexual assault also involves the invasion of a victim's home, as is the case here, that is aggravating. It is provided for in Section 348.1, but it would be aggravating even in the absence of that provision. The criminal record of Mr. Sikyea is another aggravating factor, and I will address it in more detail in a moment.

There are no mitigating factors here;

defence counsel has conceded that. I will

give credit, within the parameters that the

law allows, to Mr. Sikyea for the time that

he has spent in pre-trial custody. The net

effect of that will be to reduce the length

of the sentence that otherwise would be imposed,

but it is not truly a mitigating factor. It is

not something about him or about the offence that makes matters less serious or deserving of a lesser punishment.

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Mr. Sikyea's aboriginal descent is something that I am required to consider under our law. Parliament, recognizing the overrepresentation of aboriginal offenders in Canadian jails, has included in the sentencing principles that the requirement of restraint, which always applies on sentencing, be given special attention, special effect when dealing with aboriginal offenders. That provision has been interpreted by the Supreme Court of Canada as requiring Courts to approach the sentencing of aboriginal offenders with a different lens, one that takes into account the systemic factors that the offender has faced as an aboriginal person and may have contributed to that person coming into conflict with the law. Courts also have to consider whether a more restorative approach to sentencing is justified and better suited for an offender given their aboriginal background.

I accept, based on the submissions of his counsel, that Mr. Sikyea has been exposed to some of the systemic factors that many aboriginal offenders face. His parents went to residential school, his mother abused alcohol and lacked

parenting skills. Fortunately for Mr. Sikyea he had supportive grandparents who raised him and support him to this day, as demonstrated by the fact that his grandmother travelled here this week to attend court earlier in these proceedings.

Mr. Sikyea himself turned to alcohol, and it is obvious to me from the evidence we heard at this trial that he suffers from an alcohol problem. Some of the comments that he made to the police officer in his statement, which came out during the trial in the context of his being cross-examined on that statement, reflect the reality that he himself recognized that he gets into trouble when he consumes alcohol. The question, of course, is why he has not done anything to deal with that issue.

I am aware of the obligations that fall upon me as a sentencing judge arising from the fact that this offender is aboriginal and of the onus that it places on me to approach his sentencing with a different lens, and I am thankful to counsel for having provided me with information about Mr. Sikyea's background and some of the struggles that he has faced.

At the same time, the Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that when dealing with

serious offences and with offenders who pose
a serious threat to the community it may not be
possible to deal with aboriginal offenders any
differently than with non-aboriginal offenders,
and I think that is the situation here. Where
someone repeatedly commits serious offences
that harm fellow community members, which in
this jurisdiction are often other aboriginal
people, the different approach that the Court
has to consider using in dealing with aboriginal
offenders cannot result in the imposition of
sentences other than jail terms if that is what
is required to protect the public.

I think defence counsel, who is a very experienced defence counsel, recognizes this, because he is not suggesting otherwise. He is not asking me not to impose a jail term, and it would be very unrealistic if he did. It is very sad that people like Mr. Sikyea are exposed at a young age to difficult circumstances, hardship and abuse. There is little doubt that exposure to such things makes it more likely that they will run into problems with the law, develop addictions and behavioral problems. The Court is not without empathy for that situation and the Court is not without empathy for Mr. Sikyea. Unfortunately, the Court is left today with

dealing with this particular offender and has to be realistic about the risk that he now presents to others. The Court has to be realistic about the abuse that Mr. Sikyea inflicted on this victim, and on his other victims, and of the very real risk that he could harm someone again.

The Court has very limited tools to deal with the underlying problems that lead to this conduct as part of a sentencing hearing. In fact, the Court has no tools at all to address those problems. All the Court can hope is that while in jail Mr. Sikyea will have access to services and resources that will help him deal with the underlying issues that he faces.

All this to say, this is not a case where the fact that Mr. Sikyea is of aboriginal descent is something that can justify not imposing a jail term, nor do I think under the circumstances that it can justify imposing a shorter jail term than what is required to protect the public and achieve the principles and purposes of sentencing.

The Crown is seeking a jail term of seven to eight years. The defence acknowledges that jail must be imposed, and a significant jail term must be imposed, but asks that I exercise

1 restraint and impose a sentence in the range 2 of five to five and a half years. I raised 3 on my own the issue of whether this was a case that the Court should order that Mr. Sikyea 4 5 serve at least half of his sentence before being eligible for parole. After having considered its 7 position the Crown is asking me to do just that. The defence is urging me not to given the fact 8 9 that Mr. Sikyea, when he has not been in jail in recent years, has shown an ability to have 10 initiative, find work, a willingness to put 11 12 himself out there and re-locate to places where he could find work, and that he has 13 14 some marketable skills that can assist him 15 in turning his life around if he chooses to 16 do so. 17 The Crown has referred me to three cases 18 in support of its position. Two of them, R. v. Gladue 2011 ABCA 378 and R. v. Janvier 2011 SKCA 19 20 133, are examples where home invasions were 21

The Crown has referred me to three cases in support of its position. Two of them, R. v. Gladue 2011 ABCA 378 and R. v. Janvier 2011 SKCA 133, are examples where home invasions were treated as an aggravating factor on sentencing. They are also examples where sentences in the range similar to what is sought by the Crown here were imposed. But there are several distinguishing factors between this case and those two cases, and I agree with defence counsel that they are not of significant assistance in

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supporting the range of sentence that the Crown seeks.

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What I mean by that is that those sentences of seven years in those cases may well have been appropriate, but from the reasons that led to those sentences being imposed it seems that the considerations that led to that range were different, even though what is common to the three cases is the home invasion element. For example, things like the use of a weapon, the existence of a spousal or trust relationship between the offender and the victim, prior violence against the same victim, are all things that would be significant aggravating factors and are not present here. On the other hand, in this case the offender has a prior related conviction for a sexual offence, a fact that does not appear to have been present in either of the two cases filed. So the cases are distinguishable.

The sentencing decision that relates to Mr. Sikyea's previous sexual assault conviction, though, is significant, and it is significant for a number of reasons. First, the sentence imposed in that case was five years. The actual further jail term imposed was less than that because of the remand time, but the Court concluded that a fit sentence in that case was five years.

That is a significant sentence, even after
trial, for someone with the relatively limited
criminal record that Mr. Sikyea had at that
time. That sentence was imposed for an offence
of sexual assault only, because the jury did
not find Mr. Sikyea guilty of break and enter;
although to be fair, the Court did treat the
fact that this happened in the complainant's
home as an aggravating factor.
But more importantly, the information

But more importantly, the information disclosed in the decision from 2005 about some of Mr. Sikyea's other convictions is very disturbing. The Crown has referred to this in her submissions, but for the purpose of these reasons for sentence I think it is important that I refer to it as well, and I am quoting from page 4 of the decision where the Court is talking about the record. Of course, the Court is talking at that point about some of the convictions that pre-date 2005. The Court said:

There are four instances where

Mr. Sikyea got into a home without

permission, and in each case was

found in the bedroom, or the doorway

of the bedroom, of a sleeping woman

1	or young girl. In one instance,
2	the mischief conviction in March of
3	2003, the circumstances were similar
4	to this offence in that the victim
5	was sleeping on a mattress on the
6	floor with her boyfriend on a couch
7	nearby, and she awoke to find
8	Mr. Sikyea on the mattress beside
9	her.
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11	In none of those prior instances
12	did Mr. Sikyea sexually assault
13	the victim, but of course, however,
14	that may have been only because
15	she did wake up. Clearly, however,
16	it has to be of concern that
17	Mr. Sikyea has been so often
18	found lurking and watching around
19	sleeping women.
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21	Evidently this information was disturbing
22	to the Court in 2005. Knowing now that there
23	was a further instance where Mr. Sikyea broke
24	into a residence and sexually assaulted a person
25	who was in a vulnerable state, sleeping and
26	alone, it is of great concern to this Court
27	today. In the 2005 sentencing it appears from

the reasons for sentence that Mr. Sikyea attacked a woman who was sleeping next to her boyfriend, and it also appears from the decision that when that woman woke up and started screaming at him he left.

In the trial I heard this week the victim was more vulnerable because she was alone in the house, and Mr. Sikyea knew that. In addition, when she woke up and started to resist he did not leave. He overpowered her and continued what he was doing. That type of escalation, to my mind, is of great concern.

There are similarities between the crime
that I must now sentence Mr. Sikyea for with
the crime that led to his 2005 sentencing.
As I said, there are differences, but they
are not in Mr. Sikyea's favour: There was
a greater vulnerability on the part of the
victim, and more force was used once she
woke up.

Restraint is an important sentencing principle. A sentence should never be longer than what is required to achieve the objectives of sentencing and uphold sentencing principles that govern the Court. Mr. Sikyea has already received a significant jail term for this type of crime, and even after serving that long

him for today, he has not stayed out of trouble.

He has involved himself with drugs and he has

committed other offences. That, combined with

what he did in September of 2011, suggests that

he continues to present a very real threat for

the safety of his community.

The paramount sentencing consideration
here has to be the protection of the public.

General deterrence and denunciation are also
important factors and principles because of
the prevalence of the crime of sexual assault
in the Northwest Territories. Unfortunately,
this Court has numerous occasions to comment
on the prevalence of this type of offence.

It is disconcerting how frequently sexual
assaults occur in this jurisdiction, and it
seems that no matter how many times the Court
talks about denouncing that behavior and the
harm it causes it continues to happen.

Going back to what I said before, the

Court only has limited tools to respond, and

all it can do is continue to respond sternly

when these types of crimes are committed.

I do not know what it will take for Mr. Sikyea

to change his ways. He has five children and

he is still quite young. He is able to work

and he obviously has some good skills and good potential. I do not doubt, as he told the police and to some extent as he said during the trial, that alcohol is a big contributor to him getting into trouble.

But, as the judge found in 2005, I am unable to accept that alcohol is the only reason. Many people drink, sometimes too much, and do not go out breaking into people's home and raping them. There are deeper issues here. I am not a psychologist, psychiatrist or an expert in such things, but it is evident from the criminal record that there are deeper issues here. The Court pointed this out when sentencing Mr. Sikyea over seven years ago, and unfortunately I have to point that out to him again today.

In the 2005 decision the Court noted that

Mr. Sikyea had only been out of jail for a few
days from his previous sentence when he committed
that sexual assault. On that matter he was
on remand until his trial and then received a
lengthy jail term. I do not know when he was
released from that sentence, but looking at his
subsequent offences and the fact that there was
remand time on those as well, it is clear that
he has spent a good portion of the last decade
in custody.

I heard earlier today that he was released from his last sentence of two years less a day in June of 2011. He committed this offence that I am sentencing him for today within a matter of months. The sad conclusion I have to draw from this is that he continues to be a serious threat to members of his community. The offence he committed in 2011, like the one for which he was sentenced for in 2005, was predatory in nature, it was serious and it caused great harm. I do not have the benefit of a victim impact statement in this case, but as I mentioned in my reasons for decision on the trial, I observed the complainant during her testimony. I saw the emotional and physical reactions that she had while she was talking about these events, and it is obvious that she remains affected by it until this day. Mr. Sikvea was entitled to have a trial and he should not be punished more harshly because he

Mr. Sikyea was entitled to have a trial and he should not be punished more harshly because he exercised that right. But his evidence at trial shows that he is completely unwilling to take any responsibility for his actions. He put the entire responsibility for these events on the complainant. Until and unless he is willing to face his own responsibility for things, until he deals not only with his alcohol problem but

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also whatever underlying problems are making him target women in this way, he will continue to be a threat.

The Court does hope that he will get help during this sentence, that he will make the most of that help to address the underlying issues that make him act this way, because as I said the Court is not without empathy for the struggles he has faced growing up, and the Court is aware that the road to recovery from such things is a long one. But the Court would be remiss in its duty if it did not recognize the seriousness of this conduct and the threat that he poses.

The sentence imposed in 2005 should not be treated as a minimum sentence or a starting point, and to that extent I agree with defence counsel. The so-called step principle or jump principle in many ways is not really a principle in my view; it is more a recognition of the logical fact that if someone commits the same offence over and over again and persists in the conduct that person can expect to be dealt with more severely over time. Recidivists are treated more severely than first offenders.

But when I apply the three-year starting point that I am bound to apply, when I note the absence of mitigating factors and I take

into account the aggravating factors, including the criminal record, when I take into account Mr. Sikyea's own circumstances, I conclude that the sentence to be imposed this time has to be more significant than the sentence that was imposed the last time for essentially a very similar offence.

However, after consideration I have

decided not to exercise my discretion to delay

Mr. Sikyea's eligibility for parole pursuant

to Section 743.6 of the Criminal Code. I have

reviewed the decision of R. v. Zinck [2003]

1 S.C.R. 41 of the Supreme Court of Canada

where that provision was interpreted, which has

reminded me of some of the governing principles

that must be taken into account when making this

type of decision. It is a provision that should

be used in rare circumstances.

After some hesitation, because I am concerned about the risk that Mr. Sikyea presents to the public, considering that he will be in jail for a lengthy period of time, I have concluded that the monitoring of his progress, the assessment of his risk level, is better left with the correctional authorities and the people who will have day-to-day contact with him over a period of time.

But in order to make sure that those authorities are aware of my concerns and aware that these concerns stem not just from what happened in 2011, but for the pattern that has emerged since 2003 and possibly before that, I am going to direct that a copy not only of the transcript of my reasons for sentence, but also a copy of my reasons for judgement in this case, and a copy of the 2005 reasons for sentence from this Court, that all of these materials be provided to the correctional authorities.

I can only hope that with this information and other information the authorities will be able to gather that they will ensure that Mr. Sikyea is exposed to the type of programs and treatment that he needs to get, if possible to get to the root causes that underlie his conduct. Because otherwise it is almost inevitable that at some time in the future there will just be another victim, and if Mr. Sikyea is convicted again of something like this he will find himself at the receiving end of an application to have him declared a dangerous offender and the Crown seeking to have him incarcerated indefinitely. And that is not something that is in Mr. Sikyea's best interest. So the only positive thing that I can think of

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that could come out of the sad events that led
to this case is if it can be a turning point
for him.

I will grant the ancillary orders that the Crown has sought. First of all, there will be a DNA order because this is a primary designated offence. There will be an order that Mr. Sikyea comply with the Sexual Offender Information Registration Act. This requirement will be in force for the rest of his life because he has already been subject to an order as far as the 2005 sentence. For a subsequent order it has to be for life.

There will be a firearms prohibition order.

Now, the Crown has asked that it be consecutive to the existing order which was made in relation to the 2005 sentence. Because I do not know on what date Mr. Sikyea was released from that sentence I do not know when that firearm prohibition order will expire. But the intent is that the order that I make today expire ten years after the expiration of the existing one.

So Mr. Clerk, the wording should be that the order commences today and expires ten years after the expiration of the order made in 2005.

There will not be a victim crime surcharge in this case because of the amount of time that

- 1 Mr. Sikyea has spent on remand and the length
 2 of the jail term that I will impose on him today.
- There will be an order for the return of

 any exhibits seized that are appropriate to be

 returned to their rightful owner. Any other

 exhibits will be destroyed, but all of this

 of course only at the expiration of the appeal

 period.
- 9 Mr. Sikyea, stand up, please.
- 10 Mr. Sikyea, it gives me no joy at all to send someone to jail for a long time, but based 11 12 on everything I heard this week I feel I have no choice. For the break and enter and sexual 13 14 assault that you committed I have decided that 15 a fit sentence is a sentence of seven years. I am going to give you credit for 17 months 16 17 for the time that you spent on remand, pre-trial 18 custody. So there will be a further jail term of five years and seven months. You can sit 19 20 down.
- 21 Are there any questions, counsel, or any
 22 requirements for clarification or anything that
 23 I have overlooked?
- 24 MR. BOYD: Nothing from the defence, Your
- Honour.
- MS. VAILLANCOURT: Nothing from the Crown, Your
- Honour.

1	THE COURT: Thank you. Before we close
2	court I want to thank counsel for your work on
3	this case and your professional conduct of it,
4	and the court staff for their work, particularly
5	my thanks to Mr. Court Reporter for assisting me
6	with a transcript of the evidence. With that we
7	will close court.
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10	Certified to be a true and accurate transcript, pursuant
11	to Rules 723 and 724 of the Supreme Court Rules.
12	Supreme Court Rules.
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14	Joel Bowker Court Reporter
15	Coult Reporter
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