

Michael Touchette Interview:

May 17, 2021 @ 11:10 am PST.

Katherine Klapperich: And I hope you are recording, it says it's recording...Yes! So, for verification purposes, my name is Katherine Klapperich and I am a student at the Graduate Theological Union. I am working towards my Masters degree with the Swedenborgian Institute and my Masters is New Religious Movements, and I am speaking to Mr. Michael Touchette, correct?

Michael Touchette: Yes, ma'am

Katherine Klapperich: And we gone over the Consent Form and the Contractual Agreement that I have sent to you and we are...we have come to an understanding and this interview is both sanctioned by you and me and Graduate Theological Union.

Michael Touchette: That's right.

Katherine Klapperich: Alright, sir. So I'm going to start with the basic questions which I have supplied to you before hand and we'll just...

Michael Touchette: Okay

Katherine Klapperich: ...we'll go from there, sir. Because I really do want this to be a conversation more than anything.

Michael Touchette: Okay

Katherine Klapperich: And...

Michael Touchette: Do me a favor?

Katherine Klapperich: Sure.

Michael Touchette: My name's "Mike", not "Sir".

Katherine Klapperich: Al...alright, Mike.

(Both laugh)

Katherine Klapperich: Old habits die hard...

Michael Touchette: Oh, me too...me, too. I understand.

Katherine Klapperich: Alright, so Mike...uh...let's start with where were you on November 18th, 1978?

Michael Touchette: Georgetown, Guyana.

Katherine Klapperich: And why...why were you in Georgetown?

Michael Touchette: Uh...we had a basketball team and the Guyanese government wanted us to uh come in to Georgetown to play their national team which was preparing for, I believe it was

the PanAm Games, I really don't remember, but I think it was for the PanAm Games, so we went in...uh...to play basketball to give them practice to...um...just to give 'em practice.

Katherine Klapperich: Okay. So...when did, when did your family...it's my understanding when doing some readings that your family was actually a part of what they called the...uh Coordination Committee? Is that correct?

Michael Touchette: Don't know anything about that.

Katherine Klapperich: Interesting. Okay.

Michael Touchette: (*slight cough*) My family...I went over...I was in the first group of six that went to Guyana, and I don't have my notes, they're packed away, but I had a time, y'know I looked through all my passports and I wrote down my..my..uh...y'know different dates and I can tell 'ya that I went over in March of 1974 and with a group of six. There was three people already in Guyana. Uh...Paula Adams, Gene Chaikin, and Archie Ijames (*pronounced Imes*). And we were to prepare and get everything ready to start building Jonestown. Uh...sometime, I believe it was in May or June, myself and my uncle, Tim Swinney, we took a boat back to Miami (*Mr. Touchette begins heavy coughing*)

Call lost at 11:13:33 am PST

Call resumed at 11:14 am PST

Katherine Klapperich: Alright so, (sniffs) we'll resume that...

Michael Touchette: You ready?

Katherine Klapperich: I am ready, thank you.

Michael Touchette: Okay...uh...we took a boat back to Miami to pick up supplies and people. We picked up umm approximately twenty-five people. And we loaded the boat with supplies and we went back to Guyana. On the boat, the people that we picked up was my mother, my brother, my sister, my dad, and about twenty other people. When we got to Guyana, my dad and my mom were in charge of the project in Guyana. And when we started...uh actually working and building Jonestown, we did it as...I'm not gonna call it a "committee", I'm callin' it "the group". Ya know? Everybody that was there all had a voice in what we were doin'.

Katherine Klapperich: Alright.

Michael Touchette: Th..that my mom and dad were in charge of it. They were in charge of ..uh..buyin' material, food so on and so forth. Hope that answers your question.

Katherine Klapperich: It does. Thank you very much. It does. And...going forward what was your impression...How old were you? I don't believe I've asked that.

Michael Touchette: Uhhh...when I went over? I was twenty-one.

Katherine Klapperich: Okay. And, were you married?

Michael Touchette: Uh, yes.

Katherine Klapperich: Mmm..hmm.

Michael Touchette: Myself and Debbie uh...we got married in 1971.

Katherine Klapperich: Alright. Now was she...were you a part of the Temple when you got married?

Michael Touchette: Oh! E..e..uhh, yes. And she was part of the group we picked up in Miami.

Katherine Klapperich: Okay.

Michael Touchette: And to answer your question, was she a part of the Temple? She grew up in the Temple.

Katherine Klapperich: Oh. Alright.

Michael Touchette: From the time she was like maybe I wanna say five or six years old.

Katherine Klapperich: Alright. Is...is Debbie still with us?

Michael Touchette: Yeah. She was, when umm...when we got to Guyana, they..the Temple always did from what I know everything was done integrated. There was always a white person and there was always a black person. And in Guyana, Debbie was...uhh the black liaison, if you wanna call her that. From the Temple. Her and this woman named Paula Adams they did ya know the contact with the government. Made sure with the visas and customs and they would start uhh... buyin' supplies or whatever. And so Debbie's main function was in Georgetown.

Katherine Klapperich: Okay. And...and building upon...building upon the integration what was your role(?) impression of Peoples Temple's philosophy?

Michael Touchette: Well...that goes back the way that I was raised. My mother raised us where there was no color. And she made a point to ta raise...there was four of us, four kids, and she made a point to uhh...to raise us that way. And there was certain times during...uh...my growin' up where she told people, basically, you can get outta my house if you wanna talk that way, ya know, racially? And my father was one of 'em. So when I got, went to the Temp, when I started going to the Temple..uh...the very first time was in Indianapolis, this was before they moved to California and I was *a-mazed* about th..how black and white people were together. Because it..my life was, basically, segregated. The high school I went to had one or two black kids in it...um...ya' know and I was just *a-mazed*. And then, when I got involved, several yer..several years later, uh...I went to a Youth Night and I could not believe how people of color could be together. Because I wasn;t raised that way. I mean, 'ya know, watchin' the TV back in the sixties and...and seein' all the...the...segregation. It just...it blew me away. I've never had a problem with it, I never will, and I believe in integration. I really do. Uh...it's the only way we're gonna get tog...get along. That's my opinion.

Katherine Klapperich: So did you understand this to be...so, basically did you understand this to be a socialist or communist type community?

Michael Touchette: La...later on . Not a...not in the beginning. But, later on. It, then I understood what...what was goin' on and to this day, I believe in it.

Katherine Klapperich: So what, what did you think of it at the very beginning? I mean you later on understood. So, so what was the impression at the beginning?

Michael Touchette: Uh...it is was a good thing.

Katherine Klapperich: Okay.

Michael Touchette: They were against the war in Vietnam. They were against how people were...uh...economically treated. I guess you could say, how ya know we have such...you got the rich and then you got the poor. And the poor's, basically ya know, real lower...uh...lower class white people and, basically, all of the black community Latin and Asian communities. And, I...uh...I believed it and I still do the way that they...they, ya know, disagreed with the way our system is.

Katherine Klapperich: Okay. So, do you feel there's a lot of comparative about the movement back in 1960's and 70's that is reflective of what's going on today?

Michael Touchette: Uh...yeah...somewhat...yeah, I do. Yuh I really do with...with what's goin' on with specially what's in our country right now. Absolutely. And...um...I...I even have had talks with different people because, ya know, it's like all George Floyd or this that all hold up a minute, man, it's not just a matter...a matter of this just happened. This was goin' on in the 50's *before* the 50's. And the 60's. Where I remember watchin' on TV on the national news where in Alabama and Louisiana and all them where they would turn the dogs and firehoses onto black people. Ya know, this isn't nothin' new that's goin' on? It's just now, hopefully, people are so tired of it that it will change.

Katherine Klapperich: So, you...you yourself...were one of the first groups of six down there. And it was from your readings, it was basically a plot of land out in the middle of nowhere that you had to cut your way through to get to...at that time. So, I would imagine everyone's participation was...

Michael Touchette: Is what? I didn't hear that...

Katherine Klapperich: I imagine everyone's participation? **Michael Touchette:** Mmm...hmm..**Katherine Klapperich:** was as valued and necessary as the next persons? (*slight talking over*) So there wasn't a lot of wiggle room to be selective about who did what job?

Michael Touchette: The way...the way we did it..it was...we had...now I don't know who selected the people to come down. I have no clue, okay. Uh...I know that myself I was asked to go over in the first group because there was a group of eight...I think it was eight people that left. One of those...and I was very close to all of the people who left the group. Who left the Peoples Temple. One of them was my sister. And I lived with...um...a few of the people we were startin' a commune. And so when these...this group left it scared Jim...scared Jim Jones

that they would try and contact me and other people to leave. So he asked if I, "...wanted to go to Guyana?" Umm...other than that...when we first got down there, the first group of twenty-five people or so, we had one guy who was a farmer. We had another guy who was...uh...into agronomy. Uh...another guy who was somewhat into construction. I mean we had a diverse group of people that somebody knew something. And that's how we built Jonestown.

Katherine Klapperich: Okay. Did you feel that everybody had equal opportunities within the organization? Within the group?

Michael Touchette: At th...in the early days?

Katherine Klapperich: Yes.

Michael Touchette: Yes. Absolutely.

Katherine Klapperich: And as...as time progressed?

Michael Touchette: Um...for the first...up until the mass of people came over. We...they would send us down a couple people at a time. And, but when the mass group of people came down, that's when everything changed as far as building Jonestown. We had a good part of it already built, to a certain extent, and but when the grou...when the mass group of people came down then it was like the ones of us had been down there who knew the problems because the problems down there aren't the same problems that you have here. I mean you can't run out in Guyana you have a machine breakdown, you can't run out to the hardware store. I mean we were however you wanna look at it, we were a day...a day trip by boat to get to where we were. Or an airplane trip. But, if you needed a part that means somebody had to go into Georgetown, get a part, and which ya know you're talkin' worse than a third world coun...country where they just didn't have everything. So, it was very hard to...uh in the beginning to build Jonestown. And when we had...when we came up to a problem, it wasn't a thing where, like I said, where you could go to a store, there was no stores. We sit there and we try to figure out the problem by ourselves and we did the best we could. And when these people came down, when the mass of people started to come down, they didn't understand that. They thought, oh you can just go buy a part, well there...you can't. So, we had...we...there was a lot of conflict after th...the large group of people started comin' down.

Katherine Klapperich: Alright. Did that conflict also lead to...uh...lead to suspicion within the group? Do you think it was negative in the groups' perception overall of each other?

Michael Touchette: No. I don...not a suspicion. It was just...you know like, it..i..how we...it was like, "Look, you just got here. You don't understand how things work. "...And it was like, "Oh, well we're here to fix things." Well...you can't do that. You know, you can't do it the way you want to. And it was just a...it was a conflict between the new people and the ones of us that'd been down there for a couple of years. But I don't...suspicion I don't...I don't go with suspicion.

Katherine Klapperich: Alright. So, jumping forward a little bit...because I would like to get into the intricacies of how Jonestown was built, **Michael Touchette:** Sure. (*slightly talking over*)

Katherine Klapperich...as far as...as a person I...I'd be very interested in how did you get the wood in there to build the buildings? How did...how did you consider sceptic and water, and actually develop that in the middle of a jungle?

Michael Touchette: (*laughter and what sounds like rubbing hands together*) It was a lot of fun, I'll tell you that!

Katherine Klapperich: (*laughing*)

Michael Touchette: Understand everything is from my perspective. Somebody whose still alive who was down there with me when we were building it? They might not say what I'm...how they, you know... like how I feel. Which I understand. It's not for everybody. It *wasn't* for everybody and that's...anyway what we did was...we, in the beginning, the first thing was to gain access into where Jonestown was built. And from...from the main road, now you're talkin'...you don't have...at that time there's no private...there was no private people or companies. It was the government of Guyana. So, everything was like a government road, or the government housing. But when we first got there, they...uh...the government gave us...they had a...uh...I forget what they call them, it was like...uh...a youth...a youth...uh...what am I tryin' to say? Uh...uh...they had barracks that they had built for youth people that were tryin' to do what we did. Farm and try to make it. But it failed, so here's these buildings that were...that were...not being used. So, in the early days we stayed in these barracks. Which was in a small town called Port Kaituma. And, what we did was we travelled, every day, approximately three and a half miles to the beginning of our road where Jonestown Road started. And I'm sure you've seen the picture where there's a lot of bananas and plants and there's a big sign that says, "Welcome to Jonestown" or whatever it says. From that point, where the government road...uh...where our road met the government road, the Jonestown was three and a half miles and it was just...the first time I saw it, it was pure raw jungle. It was somethin' you only see in National Geographic. First time I went in, they had a group of...of uh...th...the indigenous tribe, or people, their called Amerindians. And we had, I had...Amerindians in front of us and Amerindians behind us. And they were...all of 'em were...they had machetes and they were cho...they were following a trail that a surveyor and these indians had cut. And we...after we went in ta...uh...the three and a half miles, the surveyor looked at us and said, "This is your center of Jonestown". And so the way we cleared the jungle to get the jungle...uh cleared away was the Indians, they cut all the trees down. And they did it in sections. And once the trees and everything was cut down, they let it lay on the ground for some days to dry to get, ya know...get rid of some of the green leaves and all that kind of stuff, and then they set fire to it. After they did the whole three and a half miles this way, then I went in with a bulldozer and I cleared all the...cleared our road away. And I had a...a path that they had put stakes on to give me the center of where and it was a thousand feet on each side of...of the center of the road. And I cleared all the trees off...and then I built the road into Jonestown. When the road ended at the center of Jonestown, they had cut...uh thirty acres. Uh...cleared all the trees...cut all the trees down and all that and by this time what we had done...we had the Indians build us...a...a building. And it was made out of trees, poles. We made it where we had six bunks in it, or not bunks, but six beds. We made us our stove. We...there was a spring real close to where the place

was in our first part of us...of us being there where we would get our water from. As far as taking care of our needs, sanitation, we'd just hang it over a log, take care of it, and then we'd be back in business. And that was in the...er...early...early days. Once we cleared the thirty acres, then what we did was, we started plotting...or...or planning what we were gonna do. Now we would go into...most of us were living in Port Kaituma at the time because we didn't have housing for everybody. While this was going on we were building our first building, so we could have everybody live in Jonestown and not live in Port Kaituma. We would map out...just hand draw things and say this is where we want the garden. This is where we want to build a well. This is where we want to build an outhouse. That type of thing. And we just did it on a whim. We didn't know what we were doin', we just did it. And that's how we built Jonestown. Hope that answered your question.

Katherine Klapperich: It did, thank you, because I was really curious about that. How things actually got started down there from nothing. And...**Michael Touchette:** Mm...hmmm...

Katherine Klapperich:...you had made mention that it was a pioneering effort...**Michael Touchette:** Boy, it was...**Katherine Klapperich:**... a pioneering attitude and boy it sounds like it sure was, sir...Mike (*both laugh*)...caught myself!

Michael Touchette: But we had...it was the...the surveyor, who...his name was Bernie Matthews, and he was...he knew because...uh...that area where we were at, it had a lot of umm...ravines in it. You had high ground, then you had low ground. And so he told us...he showed...he would show us different spots like where we raised then livestock where we kept the chicken and the pigs and the cows was about a mile and a half from the center of Jonestown. And it was on a high spot, so we cleared that away and we knew that was gonna be where the livestock was. And we did another area where we were gonna put the little...we called 'em little cottages...little cottages...the big buildings that we built. We...we knew where we were gonna put everything, but it was sitting down and saying, "Okay, this is how we're gonna do it." And then, everybody had a voice in it. The...the...the guy who was the farmer who was in livestock, he would say, "Hey, I need to do this this and this. I need this building built. I need to do that..." or whatever it was, and we took care of it. The guy who was into gardening and plants and that type of thing, he said, "I need a building for this. I need to be able to do, ya know, different things". So, we took care of that. And that's how we...that's how we did it. And I'm gonna tell ya, *none* of us...not *one of us* had experience in this kind of stuff before.

Katherine Klapperich: Um...out of curiosity, and this is probably just a tangent that I'm going on, did you have problems with a-animals from the jungle coming into the camp and upsetting the livestock or...or the food?

Michael Touchette: (*clears throat*) there was two times that we had prob...it...it really wan't a problem the first time. They have umm...a group of monkeys down there called "howler monkeys". And when they...they roar and they make one...it...it...it's a scary sound really...especially at night and...um you could hear these monkeys way off in the distance and, in the early days, the only thing that we had for electricity was what they...what we called a "kerosene wiki". And it was like you take a...a small jelly jar, let's say, you take the lid and you cut a hole in the lid, you take some material to make a wick out of, you take like another...like

aluminum, excuse me, wrap the wick in aluminum and set it down in the kerosene and ya light it. So, when we were done at night, all we would do...and that's when we only had the building for six people. When we were done playing cards, or dominoes, or whatever it was, we'd blow the...blow out our wicks and we'd go ta sleep. Well, this one night, these monkeys came right up...*right up* to our building and it scared the bejees out of all of us. We didn't know what...ya know...because we didn't know what the monkeys were gonna do or anything else. But those things, when...I mean I was sittin' there and...and...ya know...you're...you're shakin' or whatever and you're, "Man, did you guys hear that? That thing's right outside the d...ya know...outside the building!" Because we had no walls on the building. It was, I mean you're out in the, you know what I...i...it's just stuff you see in National Geographic, that's all I can say. That was one time. The second time is with our...when we started gettin' pigs, we had a problem with uh vampire mon...uh vampire bats. And so we had ta find out a way to get rid of the bats. Se we di...we had someone go into Georgetown, they did research, they talked to people about it, and we found out how to get rid of the vampire bats. And we did.

Katherine Klapperich: How'd ya get rid of 'em?

Michael Touchette: Bats, they go in...and let's say they go into a building they go in one way and they go out one way. They don't go deviate and go out the sides. They go in one and go out the other. Well, I don't remember if it was on the...I think it was on the outside where they would go out. Then, we put up a big net and we would catch the bats. And then you, we'd put poison on 'em. And they would go back to the nest and, bats clean each other, and so eventually, they got rid of...we got rid of their...whatever ya call it, colony or whatever...ya know...the whole place was...ya know...we didn't have problems really with bats after that.

Katherine Klapperich: So, when the people started...uh arriving en masse, I imagine the whole dynamic obviously changed as well, and there was...uh an adjustment period between those who had already been there and those who were arriving, but (*exhales*) it's...it's also from what I have read, things also started ta sour. **Michael Touchette:** Mmm.hmm...**Katherine Klapperich:** Or...not sour, I don't know that that would be a correct word...**Michael Touchette:** That's a good one...that's good...**Katherine Klapperich:** But things started to sour and...**Michael Touchette:** Mmm...hmmm...**Katherine Klapperich:**...people became somewhat disgruntled and more disenchanted with...with the vision...**Michael Touchette:** Mmm...hmmm...**Katherine Klapperich:** Would...would that be true for you and your family as well?

Michael Touchette: Well, I'll tell ya, I can't speak for the rest of my family. Uh...nobody's alive in my family who...uh who was down there. But, at the time it...I can...it...it...I can...like I said this is my perspective and the way I feel. I'd still be there. I...I believed in what we were doin', and I enjoyed it *so* much. The only thing that topped that was the birth of my kids and my grandbabies. Other than that, I've never had a time in my life like I had down there. Doin' what I did. But, it soured. You...it...that's a very good term. That's...that was good. An' it...when all the people...because there was a time period from when we started getting people down there until Jim showed up. And then, once he showed up, that's when everything just totally went to the pits that's...that's...that did every...that did it in was when he showed up.

Katherine Klapperich: What was your impression of him, if I might ask?

Michael Touchette: Oh, sure. In the beginning, there was good. Here's a man whose talkin' about how the injustice in the world, especially here in the States, uh how it...it had to change. We had programs that were goin' on. We were helpin' feeding people. Clothing people. And, ya know, being a young...a young guy i...it to me was the greatest thing goin'. And then I really had no impression...anything...not an admiration so to speak but, no negative side or no real positive side...uh to him when I went to Guyana. But, once I was there and he showed up, then through the help of people...uh one person, Stephen...Stephen Jones...then I saw what was goin' on. Cause I didn't know. I had no clue.

Katherine Klapperich: And then, what did he help you see? If you can speak about that.
(*unintelligible overtalking...*)

Michael Touchette: Umm...he helped me see that...uh like what he...what his dad was doin'. Ya' know, druggin' people for sex. There was...uh real dear friend of Stephen's who...a female...who they drugged so he (*Mr. Touchette was referencing Jim Jones...not Stephen*) could have sex with her. Uh...and about the White Nights and people invading us...eh...in the beginning oh I believed it. Ya know...um you're only hearin' a source from one man, ya' know...or one person. And Stephen...uh told, ya' know he set me down and said, "Hey! This is wrong. Ya' know, he's not...it's not true." And then my, when that...when that happened that's when my whole perspective of Jim Jones just totally changed. And also...and also too is that up until...up until I went into play basketball, there was people who wanted to leave. And we had a meeting with...uh Marceline, Stephen's mama and there was...there was several of us in this meeting. And we said, "Ya' know, enough's enough. People wanna leave, let 'em leave." Ya' know? Because that type of life, and I don't know how much of a South you've been into like down in Miami. Or if you've been in the islands in South America, but weather...the humidity...and the heat...for some people it's unbearable. You can't take it. Well, sure then there's gonna be people who wanna leave. Ya' know and the food...the people...uh we only had limited food. But at the same time, everybody ate, ya' know? And so...I... like I said...I can understand people wanting to leave and we *believed* they should be able to leave. But Jim didn't want that. And, ya' know, like I said when Stephen started talkin' to me that's when I changed my perspective about Jim. But not about Jonestown. Like I said, I'd still be down there today.

Katherine Klapperich: How did...how did your life change...I'm going to skip forward...how did your life change after November 18th?

Michael Touchette: Uh (*sighs*)...after getting over the initial shock because we were treated...we were treated good, but we had a hard time when everybody died. They put all of us who were in...in the house, in Georgetown, there was like fifty some odd people in this house. People who had just come in from the States, who were gonna go to Jonestown. We had people from Jonestown who came into Georgetown who needed medical or whatever. But, after...when that night that everything happened, they...uh...Sharon Amos killed her...her and her two kids...were...three...yeah...two...yeah three kids were killed, and the...the police knew somewhat was was goin' on in Jonestown. Now, the only way you could communicate is by

short-wave radio at the time. There was no cell phones or anything like that, it was by short-wave radio. And they had already started getting messages about the congressman (*Ryan*) being killed and all that. Well, they put us under house arrest. And we were under house arrest for one to two weeks, I wanna say. And so being treated that way...uh being under house arrest...like I said, we weren't treated bad. Uh I don't remember anything bad about it, ya know...brutality or nothin'. It was they treated us nice its just we were under house arrest. And...uh so that took some of the hurt, or the shock out of what happened with all the people dyin'. But, when it was all over with and there was the people who left Jonestown on their own while all the killing was goin' on they...uh we hooked-up with one another. Now there was suspicion there. Where they...they uh ...there was not like a trust between us. Between the two different groups, if you wanna call it that. To where, ya know, if you had a buddy in...in Jonestown and ya know, "Hey how ya' doin'?" this that and the other thing and then whenever they showed up in Jone...Georgetown, where we were, it was like, "Hey, how ya' doin'? Talk to ya later." i...i...it wan't the same. And that...uh and all that kind a like took the shock out of what happened. Then when we found out...uh exactly what took place in...in...in Jonestown and in Port Kaituma, then it was like...uh cut your heart out (*unintelligible*). I remember that we...uh had a pretty good yard...the and we all went out and just sat in little groups in the yard cryin', holdin' one another. When we found out exactly what happened. And then (*clears throat*) people left...uh the government took...the US government paid ways to get us back...and they didn't pay it...they put a loan...a lean against that person. They had to pay the lean off before they could get like a passport again or whatever it was. But then there was just a small group of us that were still there (*coughs*). And myself, and a few other people, decided we were gonna stay and ride it out for as long as we could. My father, and my grandmother, and another man by the name of Richard Janaro, and an Englishman who was part of the Temple by the name of Philip Blakey, they...those four people...were...uh, we had a big ship. They were in...they were on our ship in Caracas, Venezuela buying supplies. And when they...they came back to Georgetown sometime after all the killing, and my grandmother (*clears throat*) and this man by the name of Richard Janaro, they came on back to the States and my dad and this other gentleman named Philip Blakey, we stayed. And we had a business offer from an insurance agent who carried insurance for...for our...our boats and ya' know liability and all...and all that kind of stuff and he made us a business proposition to take control of the boat, we would sell the boat to Grenada, they would take control of the boat through the government and seize the boat put it their name and then they had bought an island and they wanted us to run the boat to haul freight between the islands, which their so many islands at that time had no means of...i...it was no boating going in with supplies and they were hurting the whole time. So, we made the arrangement with 'em and we went to Grenada after...we went to Grenada, I forget when it was...May or June of '79, and we stayed in Grenada. And our plan was to run the boat on the island to the islands and they wanted us to help build their...their island up and they would have a place where we'd build a place for us on their island. And that all went down the tubes when (*clears throat*) the...the Cuban...the Cuban-backed government...uh took over the American government that was in...that was in at the time. So, we never, the...the plans ne...never materialized to do what they wanted ta do. When I came back into the States...when D...when myself and Debbie came back into the States, it was very hard. Very very hard. Uh...number one: the time that, ya' know growin' up

there's a time period so to speak, where you learn about how to control your money. How to get a job. How to do this. How to do...ya' know you're growin' up? And you...you learn these things. Well, here I'm...when I came back to the States, I was twenty-six, I think? I think twenty-six and here I am, yeah twenty-six, and here I am...I had *no clue* about a bank account. Now I'm not jokin' you, I had no clue. I had no clue of how to control money. I had no clue about goin' out and really getting a job. And, when I did, two things that hurt me was number one; "Well, where ya' been, there's no record of you?" "Well, I've been in South America." "Oh, you were a part of that crazy group?" "Yeah." "No, we're not gonna hire you." Or, if I got past all that when they found out I was married to a black woman, that canned it. And then also at that time, back in 1979, there was a big movement goin' on for equal rights of women. So, I was looked over for jobs that gave to women and I, ya' know, how do you deal with that? I..it was just, that's where I had a real hard time when...when we first came back. Hope that answered that.

Katherine Klapperich: I...it did answer that. It answered it quite well. Uh...in the 70's and 80's I'm going to go out on a limb, you were also dealing with the returnees from Vietnam. And...

Michael Touchette: Mm...hmmm. Yes, we were. (*slight talking over*) **Katherine Klapperich:**...they were trying to readjust to society as well and there wasn't really...uh *any* grasp of based upon post traumatic stress disorder. It wasn't even a concept really, at the time and I don't think an...anybody experiencing anything along those lines had a good solid foundation to turn to for help.

Michael Touchette: Yeah. You're right. Absolutely right.

Katherine Klapperich: So, considering what you've just shared, what help, do you wish, *was* made available to you once you had returned?

Michael Touchette: Wow! That's a good question. I don't know. They did have...they had a...a...a group...errr not a group, I forget the guy's name. Chris Hatcher, maybe? I think he was a psychologist? And, I think, I'm not...you can't take me on this because I really don't remember. But we had access to this man and...uh which I met with him once or twice, and I have no clue what it was about. I...I coul...I don't remember. But...umm I know that a lot of people, when they came back, they went off the deep end. And I understand that. I understand it perfectly. And...uh for me, it was just...I dealt with it. It's the best I could tell ya'. I...uh the best I could. I dealt with it. And I went and...uh for the first, we came back in 19...November of 1979. Yeah. 1979. And for the year, two years that I lived in California it was just...I'm living. Ya' know I had...I had a guy who was in the Peoples Temple who, who...uh I was good friends with. He put us up in his home got me...helped me get a job. Helped me get on my feet. And I just dealt with it. I had, at that time, I had a lot of guilt. Over Jonestown. Uh, a lot of guilt. And, in my own way, I found I came out of the guilt. I recognized ya' know, I really had nothing to be guilty about. A lot of hurt and pain because here, my whole family...uh basically died in Jonestown. And start a family and ya' know set...we sit there and say, "Oh I wish Mom was here to see our kids." Ya' know, this type of thing. And it was...it was really hard. It was really really hard. But, to be perfectly honest with you, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart, I am happy. I am very happy that I've turned out the way I have. Because I can look at some people and say, ya'

know, “You need help.” Yeah, I may need help, too, I’m kinda crazy (*Katherine laughs*). But, uh...no in all seriousness (*Mr. Touchette chuckles*), but...uh, ya’ know, those were some tough times. Real tough times.

Katherine Klapperich: Did you find your...your best support group was other members of Peoples Temple?

Michael Touchette: No. Actually...uh actually the...with...I...I wish I could remember and I, like I said, I don’t have my paper. But...uh and I was plan...planning on getting it and I don’t know where it is with all my stuff that I packed. But um...when we came back into the States in 8...8...in ’79...when we came back in ’79 and we stayed with Wayne Pietila and his family, they helped me to get on my feet. And then within a year, year and a half I wanna say, we moved to Miami. And there, when we moved to Miami, It was just myself, my wife, my...my son who was a baby, and her...her mom and dad. And that’s all there was for me in Miami. And, I can look at...there’s some people I can look at and, ya’ know, I handled my...I handle all of my inner demons my way and they handled it their way. And I’m not sayin’ I’m right or wrong or whatever, but I’m happy. And I can look at other people and say...and look at ‘em and know they’re not happy and talk to ‘em. Because they’re still, they still have stuff inside of them from Jonestown. *That*, I can tell you, is a fact.

Katherine Klapperich: Do you...are...are you currently...uh participating in a religion? Are...are you spiritual or without a need for...

Michael Touchette: Well, I’ll tell you what. I...uh my wife, she left me. I forget when, I think it was 1987. It was ’87. And I would have left me, okay? I was...I was...uh today it’s called “crack”. Back in those days it was called “free-basing cocaine”. And I worked in a restaurant and one of the guys...and I was not every day but, ya’ know, some guy would say, “Hey, you know, you wanna line?” So, I ‘d snort a line of coke. Well, this one time this cook said, “Hey, we’re gonna free-base. You wanna come over and free-base?” “What’s free-basing?” He told me and I said, “Sure.” So, I went and I got home, Debbie was sittin’ on the bed with her bible open, she asked me where I’d been and I told her the truth. Ya know? They wanted to free-base and I said, “Sure. Let’s give it a shot.” And I said that, “I’m not gonna do it again. Ya’ know? an I did it a one-time thing.” Well, she took off and she left me. That made me reevaluate my whole situation. And she showed back up. And we were staying with her mom and dad at the time. And my daughter was about, this would have been ’85...around ’85, I wanna say...when my daughter was born. She was born in ’80. No, ’83. Excuse me, she...my daughter was born in ’83. So, about two years...she was about two years old (*coughs*). When she came back...my wife came back...and I opened the door, my little girl was standing there holding her arms out. Now tha...that instance changed my...that experience changed my life to this day. And, I...I one of the conditions for me to come back to ‘em was; I had to go to church. That’s one of the conditions my wife picked-out to me. So, I went to church. I gave my life to Christ. Got *heavily* involved in the church. And, I became an...an ordained minister. A deacon. I was gonna be going into an associate pastoral and all this and my wife, who...she’s one, who to this day, is still suffering from Jonestown. And I watch things. And, if you got Christ in your life, you should flourish. Your family should flourish. You should...there shouldn’t be no doubt...yeah you’re

gonna go through your times and this that an the other thing. But our family, was basically being torn apart. Because the way...how she was. Try to meet with the pastors of the church and it turned out that they were basically there only for money. And, over a period of time, I just said, "Enough." I'd had enough. I mean here I've gone through the Peoples Temple and not that they resembled the Peoples Temple in any way shape or form, but some of the pastors had "Pastor Appreciation Day", or week, or whatever it was...and they expected you to come up and give 'em money and gifts and all this kind of thing. And I started thinkin' about...lookin' around the...the church, here's single moms with three or four kids who can hardly make it and they're giving these pastors all their money. Which I totally disagree with. And my wife, she was one of 'em. She wouldn't work. The Lord told her not to work. So she wouldn't...she wouldn't maintain and job. Then I was makin' six dollars an hour. Bought a house and I was doin' everything I could to keep food on the table and keep the electricity on and keep aware they're not gonna for...foreclose on the house. Sayin' all that to say that I'm spiritual...to me there's a lot more to it than what there is in the Bible. And I...since I've moved here to Texas, one of the conditions (*chuckles*)...one of th (*laughs*)...one of the conditions with my son and his wife is that I have to attend their church every so often. So, out of the couple of months that I've been out here, I think I might have missed two weeks or whatever it is. Which, I'm not really enthused about their church, but I'm livin' in their home, so I'm doin' what I'm asked to do. Now I hope that one answered your question. (*laughs*)

Katherine Klapperich: It does! It certainly does. And...

Michael Touchette: Now I wanna say...I wanna say somethin' about Debbie. *Off* the record.

Katherine Klapperich: Okay. Hold on. Hold on.

Per Mr. Touchette's Request went off-record at 12:07 pm PST

Resumed Recording May 17, 2021 @ 12:13:58 pm PST

Michael Tochette: ...that's because sooner or later I know you're gonna be questioning that, so that's what happened with Debbie...

Katherine Klapperich: Alright. The recorder is now back on just so you know.

Michael Touchette: Okay.

Katherine Klapperich: Alright. A...a...a couple of things, one is do you think this could happen again? This...

Michael Touchette: Oh, it has...it has happened. Look at um...the what was the Branch Davidian...the uh...in Miami there was a group when we first got there in 80...81...called the Yahweh Ben Yahweh's?

Katherine Klapperich: Yes.

Michael Touchette: Uh...I mean, its already happened. And its...uh...it'll keep happening, I believe.

Katherine Klapperich: Is there any...is there any? Oh, this is a tough question because advice isn't the word I really am searching for. Is there any suggestions you might have for parents, or family, members who may be concerned that their loved ones are becoming participants in an organization that may turn sour?

Michael Touchette: Wow. Wow. Uh...I guess...I don't know. It would be, it would be kinda like your only belief, your own beliefs at the time or how you feel about different things..uh...some of the things are like, uh for me it's like night and day. Like I never had any. I think I had been in, before I started going to the Peoples Temple I had been into a church maybe three or four times, if that. So, I had no...no concept. I had no idea about religion. No. Regardless of what religion you want to talk about. So, somebody in the religious ya know if they're Christian or Muslim or or Hindu, *whatever* it is then you just gotta watch and listen and do what your heart feels. Ya know and your mind. Because...I mean like Jim Jones to me it started out as a fantastic organization. To me it wasn't a church. Yeah there was uh the church rhetoric, but when someone starts proclaiming themselves as Christ, ya know, and you're part of...you have that religious background then you start thinkin' about it. He would stand up at the pulpit and say that, "I am Christ. Buddha the ba..uh Buddha..." and a couple of other ones. But then he sit and say that that he's a reincarnation of uh uh I forget who it was...a communist. And so if you have, if you have that religious background and your loved one is in a religious organization, then you gotta look at it and weigh what's in your heart as right or wrong. And if it's somethin' else like uh...oh God let's pick a good one, like the Klan, or some of these right wing organizations that are goin' on right now. Well, okay your sons' in, or your loved ones involved with it, but you already know that they're in for...uh...you know they don't believe in...in uh...integration. Ya know they look at the people minority or as animals whatever? Well, you gotta look at that and you gotta decide how you're gonna deal with your...with your loved one. Uh...that's about the best way I can answer your question...uh...that's a hard question. Very hard.

Katherine Klapperich: So, is there anything else you'd like to share?

Michael Touchette: Well, what else ya got?

Katherine Klapperich: (*laughs*) I actually, I believe aside from that I was now going to say you now have a son and a daughter? Michael Touchette: Absolutely. And four grandbabies...Katherine Klapperich: And you have grandchildren? (*slight talking over each other*)

Michael Touchette: Mmm...hmmm...

Katherine Klapperich: And you're living in Texas?

Michael Touchette: Yes. What I did was...uh...I quit my job, I think it was February the eighth. And I had already planned, several months ago, it's been close to about a year now...that I was gonna quit my job and I was gonna get myself set up and I was gonna move from Miami, move here to Texas from Miami that's where my two kids are and...uh...I already talked to both of

'em and they said, "Daddy come on, you know you can...you can store your stuff here." So, and then from here, I'm gonna travel and go to the national parks. I'm gonna see as much of the national parks as I can. I have no clue of how long I'm gonna be. Don't know, I'm just gonna hit the road...um...now since I've been here it's been one thing after another that's kept me here. My son needed my help. My daughter's needed my help. And, uh, next week...the twenty-ninth, is my granddaughter's graduation. And I promised her that I would stay for her graduation, so now my daughter's gotta move. So, I told her I would help her move, so I really don't know when I'm leavin'. But then, when I leave here, I'm gonna head out. Head west. Stop off at some national parks. Get into California. Go up through uh...uh go see the national parks uh...uh..Sequoia, Yosemite. Uh there's another one there I forget the name. I'm gonna travel the Pacific Coast Highway. My sister, she lives in Sacramento. I'm gonna stop off and see her and her family. Get in touch with a few people that uh...that were in the Temple and see them. The I'm gonna head north. Go up to Oregon, Washington. That's my plans.

Katherine Klapperich: They sound wonderful.

Michael Touchette: I'm lookin' forward to it, I'll tell you that.

Katherine Klapperich: I think you should. And I think I will thank you very much for your time...and your...your input...

Michael Touchette: No Problem. No Problem

Katherine Klapperich: ...and your perspective

Michael Touchette: No problem.

Katherine Klapperich: So...

Michael Touchette: If you have any, any other questions let me know and I'll be more than happy to talk to you.

Katherine Klapperich: Thank you very much because I'm sure as I sit and ponder all this wonderful information that you gave me, I will come up with...with other questions to ask you.

Michael Touchette: Let me tell you, being down there (*Guyana*), ya know I made reference to National Geographic several times and I tell you it was like that because I saw things down there that you *might* be able to see on National Geographic. And it was *amazing!* I saw...you would have...you would have to...have you seen pictures of Jonestown?

Katherine Klapperich: I have. Yes.

Michael Touchette: Well, you can see the buildings, but then it's like a wall of trees all the way around it. And that's what it's like..i..it's like you have a clearing, and then all of a sudden there's a wall..and you..and this is no joke...you could walk, say, fifty feet into the jungle, close your eyes, and turn around, do a couple, ya know, three sixties, open your eyes and you would have no clue where you came, you came from. That's how thick it is. But, one morning, and doing what I did, I was always working. Uh...because number one, I loved operating the bulldozer...clearing the trees and the building sites and the roads and all that. One morning I was

out getting on my machine, checking my oil and all this...and...I just felt somethin'. It's dead quiet. Machine's not runnin'. It's just dead quiet. I looked up and I saw out of one edge of the ju..the clearing, just come right out of the jungle...was a group of nomad Indians. About fifteen people. And all they did was walk across it, the clearing, and went back into the jungle. You don't see that stuff here. (*laughs*) It was just *amazing*! And I saw one, same...same area, same situation, I'm getting' ready to start the machine and go to work, and I felt somethin'. And I looked up, maybe about fifty feet away from me was a black panther. Coal black panther. All I could s..and it was kinda..it wasn't completely daylight yet...but I could see the silhouette of the...of the...of the cat. And his eyes. Beautiful orange yellowish eyes. I stood there and I looked at him and I said, "I'm not gonna hurt ya." I remem..I'm just lookin' at him and in awe of what I could see, the beauty of this thing. Another one was at when I started working out there. Now this was before we could live there, where I'm still makin' my way back to where Jonestown was built. And whenever I would clear, move the trees out of the way, but some of them had been laying down so long so there's life, animal life underneath all this trees. I would scare out a mouse, or a frog, or a snake. And there was an eagle that looked just like an American bald eagle, would come down grab it and take off. This...this eagle would not let me close to him. I would...when I'd see him, I would shut the machine off and I would start walking towards this eagle. *Before* all the people showed up, I got to, *maybe* within ten feet of being able to stand there and talk to this eagle. And I would sit there and I would talk really softly to him...just, "Oh, you're so beautiful..." I mean just say whatever I had to say...at the time. And then I could see his feathers start to ruffle up and I would stop and real slowly back up. You can't do that here. Unless you go to some place that's a sanctuary for birds. See monkeys runnin' through the trees, that was amazing. Seein' all the birds, the macaws, the parrots. Just seein' ya know, this kind of stuff. And it was just an *amazing*...an *amazing* time for me. It really was. It really really was....

Katherine Klapperich: Sounds peaceful. **Michael Touchette:** Oh, one other thing! (*slightly talking over each other*) **Katherine Klapperich:** Sounds peaceful and...yes?

Michael Touchette: One other thing. What I would every once in awhile...I would head into the jungle with this...with this machine, this bulldozer, and I would head into the jungle and I would just like cut a path where I could go in and it would be just somethin' I was doin'. This one time I went into the jungle about a quarter of a mile and all of a sudden, I came to a clearing. And in the clearing you could see where they had, Indians, had lived. You could see a path coming through the jungle to this clearing and then a...a path goin' out of it. Now you talk about a weird feeling whenever you see this kind of stuff out in the middle of nowhere? It was just...I cannot tell you what it was like. It...no words can describe it. It was *amazing*!

Katherine Klapperich: Aside from the interactions that you've just described, did you *have* any communication with the...peoples that were indigenous to the area, or dis they leave you alone?

Michael Touchette: Nope. I'll tell ya somethin', I'm glad you asked me that because, to me, this is one of the most important things. About Jonestown. When we got there and we were building Jonestown, we employed over two hundred Guyanese people. They...some of them cut down the trees. Cleared th...cleared the jungle out for me. Where I would, you know, make a building site

or whatever. Some of 'em, we got big enough (?) and this happened just with a couple of years, but we got big enough where we had, I forget the number, it was like a hundred some odd, a hundred plus people planting crops. Planting uh...uh...you name it; banana trees...uh plantain, pineapple, orange trees, lemon trees, uh...and so you never hear that. You never hear about...the only way you can get to the Port Kaituma, like I told you, you take a twenty-four hour boat ride, or you take a plane ride that was like an hour and a hour and forty-five minutes, I think. They're government boat (*Guyana*) was how they got supplies in for this Port Kaituma and there was another town called Matthews Ridge and so the government boat would bring up supplies. Well, they're government boat would break down. When the government boat..boat would break down, we would haul the stuff in for the people. Not charge nobody nothing. And we would...we would help the people by bringin' supplies in. And we also helped people who were sick who needed help. We'd take them to Georgetown. Fly 'em out, or take 'em on the boat and take people in who needed help. But you don't hear about that. You never hear about that. Yup.

Katherine Klapperich: That's pretty big.

Michael Touchette: Mmm.hmm. And we had to fight, too because...we had to fight for respect because up there there they mined *years* ago, and I think it was back around World War II, there's uh..uh...I think it's you might call it a mineral called bauxite. Bauxite is a prod..is a component of aluminum. RJ Reynolds Company...uh built Port Kaituma and built this little town called Matthews Ridge. And what they did was they mined uh...they dug out the river and where Port Kaituma is there you could tell that is was for...for shipping because it had a couple of buildings in it. They had train tracks where they would offload the...the cars that would have the bauxite and they would dump it into big...uh barges and they would carry 'em out. Well, when the government took over, they kicked out the...the company. And the people who left, they disabled all of the machines that helped...uh mine this bauxite. So, the Americans had a real bad taste...or the Guyanese people had a real bad taste in their mouth for Americans because of what RJ Reynolds did. So, when we got there in ...uh Port Kaituma, to build Jonestown...they... we weren't met with real open arms because...from the local people...because of the way they were treated from uh...the big company. So that was a big thing for us to overcome and we were able to do it in short order. But, like I said, we employed a lot of people and we helped 'em.

Katherine Klapperich: Yeah, that's a bit of history you don't hear in all this.

Michael Touchette: No. No, you don't. And I tell you there's been, over the years, I forget some of the peoples' names, there was, they were doing a big uh...a big thing on...uh PBS about Jonestown and I would, I had been approached about it. And this was *several* years ago and I told 'em that, "If you want to talk about Jonestown, we'll talk about it. But, I will not talk about Jim Jones, or anything that has [*excuse me*] that has to do with the death or anything else. We'll talk about what it took to build Jonestown." He asked me on the phone, "Well, what are you talking about?" and I gave him those examples. We employed over two hundred people and so on and so forth. He said, "You have my word on it." They flew me to New York to do the interview. And sitting in the..the place where they were...we were being interviewed, he started in about Jim Jones and I looked at him and said, "When are you gonna talk about Jonestown?" "Oh, we're gettin' to it. We're gettin' to it." No sooner did I said that he asked me somethin'

about my relationship with Jim Jones. Whatever it was (*coughs*) and I told him then I said...can you hear me okay? (*Question directed at Ms. Klapperich*)

Katherine Klapperich: I can, thank you.

Michael Touchette: He...he..he told me, “Well we’ll get to it.” And then he asked me another question about Jones, and I turned around and said, “This is done.” I said, “Take me to the airport because I’m not gonna answer...you’re not talking about Jonestown.” And I’ve done that a couple of times...of...ta people. Because they want to sensationalize the mass suicide Jim Jones and they don’t want to hear about our experience of building it and they don’t want to hear about how we helped the people. And you don’t he...they don’t wanna hear...people do not wanna hear about that.

Katherine Klapperich: May I go off the record for a moment?

Michael Touchette: Absolutely.

Recording ended at 12:33 pm.

After the recording ended, Mr. Touchette and Ms. Klapperich continued to have a conversation. Although not recorded, the following notes of that conversation were not “off the record”.

Notes:

Katherine Klapperich: What types of entertainment did you have? Movies? Music?

Michael Touchette: We rented movies from Georgetown, like: Hello Dolly...do you know “The Rocky Horror Picture Show”?

Katherine Klapperich: Yes, I do! I played “Janet”. (*both laugh*)

Michael Touchette: ...and “Z”, Super Cops. We played cards, or dominoes, or we read. No one complained about it. Tim Swinney (*Michael’s Uncle*) took a boat down to Miami to pick-up supplies. We had never been on the ocean before. The other boats were faster. Only way to talk to each other was with a CB radio. Since we couldn’t keep up, they told us, “We’re not waiting for you.” So, we used a ship-to shore radio. We’d write down the channel and listen to it until we couldn’t hear it anymore, then we’d turn to a different channel. It took seven days to get to Miami. Let me tell you something, I never accepted one dime for interviews. Other people have and they changed their stories. When I flew into Miami, I was met by the FBI. Apparently, there was a list of people on a “hit squad”. I was on it. They asked me a million questions. I went to South Carolina because my grandpa died. I was met with pure hate. Hate for Jim Jones. Charles Gary (attorney for Temple), arranged for the FBI not to harass me at the San Francisco airport when I arrived back in the States. I do not have hate for Jim Jones. I had to get over my guilt. I had a spiritual awakening about that. It was a big thing about my brother and everybody who had died. Whether it could have been prevented. It will eat you up and destroy you. My family was

consumed with the hate. You've got to get rid of it. Hate finally got to my dad and grandma. I don't carry it with me. My dad was the greatest provider, but not a father. He pitted us kids against each other. Me against my brother, Albert. We put Jonestown together.