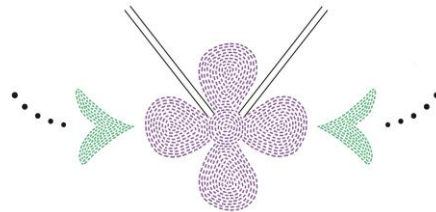


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale
sur les femmes et les filles
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process –Part 1 Public Hearings
Edmonton Inn – Courtyard Ballroom
Edmonton, Alberta**



PUBLIC

Thursday November 9, 2017

Public Volume 24:

**Wilton Littlechild, Treaty 6 Grand Chief, CM, AOE, MSC, QC;
Vanessa Corado & Muriel Whiteman, In relation to Freeda Alvina
Whiteman, Ashley Young & Brandy Wesaquate;
Joanne Ahenakew, In Relation to Laura Ann Ahenakew &
Bernadette Ahenakew**

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APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations	Non-appearance
Government of Alberta	Laura MacLean (Student-at-Law) Ashley Gelinas (Student-at-Law)
Government of Canada	Anne McConville (Counsel)
Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women	Non-appearance
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Saturviit Inuit Women's Association of Nunavik, AnânauKatiget Tumingit Regional Inuit Women's Association Inc., Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre, Manitoba Inuit Association	Non-appearance
Women of Metis Nation / Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak	Non-appearance

Note: For the purpose of establishing this record of attendance, counsel and representatives are considered present whether they attended one or all of the public hearings held over the course of the day at the Edmonton Inn and Convention Centre - Courtyard Ballroom (i.e. Public # 1)

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1 Edmonton, Alberta

2 --- Upon commencing on Thursday, November 9, 2017 at 9:09
3 a.m.

4 **MS. DEBBIE REID:** Thank you very much for
5 your opening words. I'd like to now call up someone that
6 is not a stranger to these parts, is not a stranger to
7 people out there. The Grand Chief of Treaty 6,
8 Mr. Willie -- I always used to just call him
9 "commissioner," so -- would you like to come up, Grand
10 Chief?

11 **MR. WILTON LITTLECHILD:** Well, good morning.
12 (Speaking in Native language). I just begin by greeting
13 each and every one of you with a very special thanks to my
14 sister for her opening invocation but also her powerful
15 message. *Kinanâskomitin* (speaking in Native language).
16 Thank you.

17 At the opening of the session the other
18 night, I mentioned there was some work that I think we
19 should acknowledge, as well, and not only acknowledge but
20 perhaps consider in our search for solutions, in our search
21 for solution.

22 So I -- upon reflection, after leaving the
23 opening session, I jotted down some -- some thoughts that I
24 wanted to share with you, and first of all, of course, is
25 to thank you very, very much, to thank the witnesses who

1 have come in front of the commissioners, the courage of the
2 families, the commissioners, and also the -- the staff who
3 are working, the Fire-keepers who are out there, I was
4 talking with them this morning, but also those that are not
5 here, those that are not here to -- to participate directly
6 but are supporting the work. I know that they're
7 supporting your work in a great way -- many times, "simply"
8 is not the right word, but just by prayer helping this
9 work. I'm told many times that there's prayer circles
10 being held, there's elders praying for us in their
11 own -- in their own way, so I thank all of those people to
12 begin with, and I'm honored to say a few more words this
13 morning.

14 In a way, it's amazing what's happening
15 around us as we discuss these very difficult stories and
16 hear the stories about the events that are happening around
17 the world, and I'll just mention a couple of them.

18 I'm also honored to be here because I was
19 raised by my grandparents, and I was taught about the
20 important role of men and boys in these situations, and
21 when I connect that to the hearings that we had with the
22 Truth Commission and Elders told us, for example, the
23 importance -- I mentioned the other night the importance of
24 going back to the culture and our teachings, and old
25 people -- in an honourable way, I say that term "old

1 people" -- our Elders, our seniors, reminded us about
2 sacred teachings and ceremony.

3 For example, I'm not one with authority to
4 talk fully about the rites of passage ceremony for boys. I
5 participate with my wife and participated with my wife when
6 our own daughters were going through ceremony, but a sad
7 thing happened on one of those ceremonies. She got
8 reported to the Labour Board, and the reason she was
9 reported to the Labour Board was she invited all the other
10 nurses to come and witness the ceremony, and people thought
11 that's not something that should be done during work or
12 with workers, but that's only part of the story.

13 The other more important part for me is the
14 boys and men side, the ceremonies that are held for boys as
15 well. During that ceremony, the old people -- these are
16 not my words, I'm sharing with you what I heard as a
17 commissioner in that truth and reconciliation
18 journey -- they say to us that there are sacred teachings
19 that we have, and we follow them during our commission work
20 as a theme for each of the national events, but there are
21 two teachings in particular, they said, that are very
22 important for us to return to and live out in these
23 instances that might help, and the first teaching, of
24 course, is respect, the sacred teaching of respect. We
25 started our hearings with that teaching.

1 So we learn that it's not only respect about
2 self but respect about others, respect about property,
3 respect about laws, respect about family, so that teaching
4 needs to be returned back to and instilled with our young
5 boys, they said.

6 And the other teaching, and I'm glad my
7 sister mentioned it, is one I thought would be not only
8 very difficult, but it -- I thought I'm not sure if this is
9 going to work because of the stories that we heard, and
10 that's the sacred teaching of love. Love.

11 And then throughout the hearings, we heard
12 stories about first they said, I hate myself, I hate that
13 I'm brown-skinned or I'm Indian, I'm ashamed of myself; but
14 then things turned. They changed, and in my view, in my
15 opinion, the truth and reconciliation journey also changed
16 on those days; when a woman came in front of us and said,
17 you know, I can get up in the morning now, and I look
18 myself in the mirror, and I say to myself, I love you, I
19 couldn't do that before.

20 We heard about the loss of parental skills
21 because of residential school with many and that discovery
22 of the courage to say that again. People said, you know,
23 for the first time I can now turn to my spouse or my
24 partner and say to them, I love you. For the first time
25 now, I can say to my children -- couldn't do this before --

1 I love you. Now I can say that to my grandchildren, I love
2 you, and that message that received from the witnesses, the
3 Elders, I think are two that we can reflect on on this
4 journey, the journey of trying to find our sisters that are
5 missing, trying to find how they passed on to the spirit
6 journey those that are no longer with us, that these are
7 teachings that we must go back to, old people said.

8 So I share that -- that with you because I
9 think that was an important information that we received
10 from our set of hearings that I wanted to share with you.

11 But the other part I wanted to share with
12 you was that -- I mentioned it the other day -- my work at
13 the United Nations, when I raised the issue of the murdered
14 and missing women and girls, and also, now there's a call,
15 also -- you heard it the other night -- about including
16 boys and men in that. At one time in another commission
17 that I sat on, I went to every prison, the men's prisons,
18 the women's prison, the Federal prison, the Provincial
19 prison, the mandatory or the youth detention centres and
20 looked at that situation and discovered a lot of teachings
21 there as well. So we need to make the link, I said, at the
22 other event in the evening. The residential school legacy
23 is linked to this story as well.

24 So I then learned at the United Nations
25 after I introduced the idea -- or not the idea, I'm

1 sorry -- the issue. I was asked by the president of the
2 women. I didn't want to be in a position that I'm speaking
3 for women because I want that never to be done by me.
4 That -- it needs to be done by yourself as women, but she
5 asked me, she said, I have to go home, there's been a death
6 in my family, so can you raise this issue at the UN? So I
7 did, and then after that, at every session of the Permanent
8 Forum and at every session of the Expert Mechanism, I sat
9 at those level of discussions for 12 years to make sure
10 that the issue of women was always mainstreamed in every
11 topic.

12 And then I discovered that there was an
13 opportunity to lead a resolution on violence against women,
14 and Canada lead that discussion, so I want to pay tribute
15 again to the Ambassador McCarney, for example, in the
16 Geneva Mission For Canada because they lead the discussion
17 at the UN on the resolution of violence against women.

18 But last year as I mentioned before was the
19 first time that the United Nations agreed to have a special
20 session. They agreed to have a -- what's called a
21 high-level panel at the UN with a specific focus on
22 violence against Indigenous women and girls, and I've
23 worked now 40 years at the UN, and that was the
24 most -- probably the highest honour, I would say, I had of
25 chairing a UN meeting of the Human Rights Council on this

1 topic because as I said at the opening, this is not only a
2 national issue, it's a global issue, so we need to join
3 efforts with our sisters from around the world.

4 So the special session that was held at the
5 UN in September was adopted by the Human Rights Council.
6 There's a resolution now that we should be mindful of in
7 the search of solutions, and also last couple of days, and
8 I think they just wrapped up last night, as well, there
9 were discussions in Toronto by an organization looking at
10 the root causes of the violence against Indigenous women.
11 Of course, we know the colonialism, the oppression, the
12 discrimination that you as women face is a continued
13 experience here in Canada, but it also calls on us to
14 continue to work to resolve the situation.

15 So we as Indigenous men, myself as a
16 Grand Chief for Treaty 6, I feel we have a very important
17 role to support your work, to support the panel's work and
18 also the organization against family violence. It's a
19 national Aboriginal circle against family violence, and
20 they, too, are in search of solutions.

21 So I'm here as a Chief; I'm here as a
22 father, husband, a grandfather to support your cause, to
23 support your work, because I think sometimes we've been
24 missing in terms of our voice of support.

25 So one of the things I did, and I referred

1 to it on Monday, is we did a canvas of all the
2 international law, all the human rights law, and did a
3 report. It's actually a 58-page report, which I understand
4 that you've been given a copy of, that outlines all the
5 existing international law on this issue. That should help
6 us. It should help us because Canada has ratified those
7 conventions, Canada has endorsed those declarations, Canada
8 has made public commitments both federally and
9 provincially, but also equally importantly, Indigenous
10 organizations, Chiefs have endorsed those international
11 instruments, those international norms and standards, in
12 fact, international laws.

13 So when I served as a commissioner for the
14 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we heard about the
15 impacts of residential school on Indigenous women, but I
16 know that you've already heard about that.

17 I was awoke -- woken up by a young woman
18 early in our discussions when she said, you know, I really
19 appreciate that you are talking about what happens to the
20 child when you take them away from their parents, what
21 happens to the parents from whom you've taken the children
22 away. She said, I applaud that, I see that it's in your
23 logo and in your documents, and she said, what about us?
24 What about us that came after? And she was talking about
25 the intergenerational trauma, and it really expanded our

1 work and our view after that question was raised by a young
2 woman during our hearings.

3 So we look to you now to help us to continue
4 what my sister talks about in terms of the healing. I'm
5 really encouraged by what I see across the country about
6 the engagement. We're in a new time. We're in a new era.
7 It's a short window of opportunity, but this is our time to
8 make -- to make change.

9 So I want to just refer you to -- to the
10 international law regarding specifically violence against
11 women, and in particular, Indigenous women that we've
12 submitted to you, and just for the record, the -- there are
13 actually 11 articles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of
14 Indigenous issue that deal with this matter squarely: The
15 Universal Declaration on Human Rights; the International
16 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; The International
17 Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; The
18 Convention on Rights of the Child; The Convention on the
19 Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
20 the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial
21 Discrimination; The Convention Against Torture; the ILO
22 Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. All
23 of this, these international laws, refer to this issue, so
24 it's not a lack of law. It's not a lack of a legal
25 frame work. It's a lack of implementation, and that's what

1 we need to call on to be done as a part of the solution.

2 At the Permanent Forum, for example, they
3 made a conclusion after reviewing all of the legislation.
4 They said, and I quote:

5 "Indigenous women play an integral role
6 in all aspects of economic and social
7 development, and in order for Indigenous
8 peoples to advance the effective
9 implementation of the declaration,
10 violence against Indigenous women must
11 be eradicated."

12 So that's a very strong instruction from the
13 United Nations. The Inter-American system, the OAS, the
14 Organization of American States, who also recently adopted
15 a declaration, there are two elements to it that are very,
16 very important because it's the first time this
17 international recognition by law has been adopted, and it's
18 about the Indigenous family. For the first time under
19 international law, Indigenous family is recognized, and I
20 think that's significant in these discussions.

21 Secondly, it's the first time that
22 Indigenous laws are recognized. So when you put the
23 traditional teachings that we're advised to go back to by
24 our Elders, the ones that spoke in front of us, to go back
25 to the teachings about respect, to go back to the teachings

1 about love, are now supported by international law. It's
2 there, and we need to just call for implementation.

3 It's interesting that yesterday -- I know
4 you were so busy here the last two days, you probably
5 didn't see yesterday the Inter-American Commission. That's
6 the Organization of American States, the Inter-American
7 Commission, the -- the Commission on -- the Inter-American
8 Human Rights Commission, I'm sorry, released a report
9 yesterday, and the report is on the human rights of
10 Indigenous women, and there's something in that passage of
11 one of the areas of report that I wanted to zero in on
12 because it's so appropriate to hear, I think. They talk
13 about the exposure to violence and discrimination of
14 Indigenous women in the Americas -- that includes Canada,
15 of course -- but the observation they made is that women
16 now reject being categorized as victims and have now
17 demanded recognition as holders of rights and empowered
18 actors. So that's a whole different approach to it, and I
19 think it's not only positive but very powerful, that women
20 are now demanding recognition as rights-holders. That's
21 why I share these rights with you that are there, and also,
22 importantly, to be recognized as empowered actors, and
23 that's what I see you doing, the commissioners and also all
24 of the witnesses that have been appearing in front of you.

25 So during these hearings, we could or we

1 should consider not only the Canadian but the international
2 human rights law that protects women and families; also to
3 consider the role men play in preventing violence and the
4 systems we can institute to help with this important work.

5 And just by a concluding story, as well,
6 from our journey with the Truth Commission, the observation
7 we make is despite all of this myriad of international law,
8 Canadian law, human rights law, despite the progress that
9 we've made in some areas, we still have a very -- a very
10 long way to go, and I want to encourage us to keep working
11 hard.

12 An elder told us we -- actually, we need to
13 work harder than we can, to work harder than we can, so
14 that the rights of Indigenous women and children to live
15 free from violence is now a reality, so I'd like to thank
16 each and every one of you for the work you're doing to help
17 secure these rights for women.

18 And lastly, as a commissioner, I heard what
19 were called the seven most powerful words, the seven most
20 powerful words: I'm sorry, forgive me, and I love you.
21 Those are the seven most powerful words we heard during the
22 commission, and I underscore again the last three words
23 because we heard so many times that we couldn't do this
24 before, and guess what, someone said: It's okay. It's
25 okay now to say I love you.

1 So with that, I thank you, and I encourage
2 and applaud you for your continued journey. I know it's a
3 difficult -- a difficult journey, but it's an important
4 journey because, as my sister said, it's about healing.
5 It's about healing, and I'm witnessing that happening
6 across the country in a good way, and you're adding
7 that -- to that very essential need for our people.

8 So (speaking in Native language), to thank
9 you very, very much for your dedication, your courage to
10 undertake this -- this heavy load, and just to the
11 commissioners individually, from a commissioner to
12 commissioner, not only to thank you but please, take care
13 of yourself as well. *Hay-hay*. Thank you.

14 --- Upon recessing at 9:31 a.m.

15 --- Upon resuming at 9:41 p.m.

16 **Hearing # 1**

17 **Vanessa Corado and Muriel Whiteman**

18 **In relation to Freeda Alvina Whiteman,**

19 **Ashley Young and Brandy Wesaquate**

20 **Heard by: Commissioner Qajaq Robinson**

21 **Commissioner Counsel: Joseph Murdoch-Flowers**

22 **Grandmothers, Elders, Knowledge-keepers:**

23 **Florence Catcheway, Cynthia Cardinal, Miyna Manniapik**

24 **Registrar: Bryan Zandberg**

1 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Good morning.
2 I think we're ready to start. Joey, I'll leave it to you
3 to let us know how that will be done.

4 MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Thank you,
5 commissioner. So, commissioner, this morning I have the
6 honour of working with Vanessa Corado here and
7 Muriel -- Muriel Whiteman.

8 Before coming in here, we spoke about the
9 requirement for the oath or affirmation, and before coming
10 in here, we smudged, each of us, and I would ask that for
11 the purposes of the oath or affirmation, that that satisfy
12 those requirements.

13 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I want to also
14 note that I've offered tobacco, and following protocols, I
15 accept that.

16 MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Thank you.
17 Vanessa, when I first got -- when I first
18 looked at the information that we had from you, I read
19 about your mother Freeda.

20 MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm.

21 MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: But as we spoke
22 this morning before coming in here, more names came up of
23 missing loved ones, and as Muriel and I spoke, too, more
24 names or at least one more name of a murdered loved one

1 came up, and I think it's important that we include all of
2 those names.

3 You spoke to me about Lori Whiteman and
4 Brandy Wesaquate and your friend's niece in Ontario and
5 Ashley Young, who is now in hospital, and I just thought it
6 was important to acknowledge those names, as well, and I'll
7 now stop talking and put this down and let you tell what
8 you tell us -- what you want to tell us.

9 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** With Brandy, she's a
10 relative of my family who's from Regina that went missing
11 in January 2012, and my Aunty Lori (ph) Whiteman, her
12 mother went missing in I think 1976 or could have been
13 earlier, and I just recently heard about a friend of mine.
14 She has her niece in Ontario that just went missing maybe
15 about a few months ago, and they're now on that road to
16 looking for her and, you know, searching for her, and
17 Ashley Young is a family member of mine, and she's in the
18 hospital right now, and we just want justice for her for
19 what she's going through and her family's going through.

20 It seems like, you know, with this inquiry
21 there's -- it seems all too common to hear so many of our
22 Aboriginal women or girls, you know, having,
23 like -- missing, murdered, you know, and it's not only
24 missing or murdered; it's, like, other things happening to

1 them, you know, violence and other stuff, and it's -- like,
2 for somebody -- like, for me to say, like, it's a small
3 world, and it's amazing how -- not amazing but alarming how
4 many people I know that -- I thought I was only going
5 through this, and I hear about other people and -- you
6 know, why is that? You know, like, it's -- it's getting
7 more and more common, and it's not a good thing.

8 When my mom had went missing was in 2006.
9 The Bissell Centre had reported my mom missing because
10 she -- my mom would get her cheque from the Bissell Centre.
11 That's where she got her mail. So my mom was there, and
12 picking up her mail regularly and Bissell Centre called me,
13 asked me if I knew where my mom was? No, I didn't know,
14 and they said, yeah, she hasn't been around to pick up her
15 cheque, and so I -- I never really thought much of it
16 because of the way my mom was at the time, she was always
17 out and about and doing her own thing and, you know, she's
18 keeping herself busy doing her stuff because -- and my mom
19 was, like, a -- she was an alcoholic and a drug addict and
20 always with, you know, those kind of people, and they would
21 keep, I don't know, taking her to do, you know, stuff like
22 that, and the last time I spoke to my mom, I had blamed
23 myself because we had argued that day about her drinking
24 and that I told her to come back when she was sober, and

1 you know, I blame myself. Maybe if I told her she could
2 have stayed, this wouldn't have happened.

3 You know, for a long time, I blamed myself
4 for that. You know, it's just, you know, things like that
5 make it hard to, like -- you know, you put blame on
6 yourself because you think if I had done things
7 differently, it wouldn't be like this today. It took a
8 long time to stop blaming myself for that where I had to go
9 to counseling, you know, to -- to realize, you know, it's
10 not my fault. You know, my mom went missing because, you
11 know, maybe -- you know, there were so many scenarios in my
12 head, like, maybe somebody stole her or maybe she was in
13 jail, maybe this, maybe that, you know, like, so many
14 things, and -- it's just -- you know, I thought when I
15 didn't see my mom for a while and Bissell Centre said that
16 they reported her missing, I thought, you know what, maybe
17 she's in jail because she had been in jail so many times
18 before that if I didn't hear from her, that's where she
19 was, so I just assumed this time maybe she was in jail.

20 So I went to the Remand Center one day, and
21 I walked in there, and I asked them, I said -- if
22 Freeda Whiteman was in there, and they said because of the
23 *Freedom of Information and Privacy Act*, we're unable to
24 tell you that. They said that she has to want you to know

1 she's here. She'll either call or, you know, let you know
2 some way that she's there, and -- you know, my mom had
3 suffered being beat the year before to the point where she
4 almost died, and so she was having memory loss from that,
5 and she always used to carry a little book, and -- with
6 everybody's address, names, phone number, and -- because
7 she couldn't remember phone numbers anymore, and -- you
8 know, and so when I was, like, there, I was disappointed,
9 and I thought, you know what, my mom can't even remember
10 phone numbers, so how's she going to call us?

11 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Can I ask you a
12 question about that? What were your experiences -- you
13 said your mother had been in jail before.

14 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

15 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Did you have
16 any experiences in communicating with your mother when she
17 was in jail before that?

18 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Yes, I did.

19 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Can you talk
20 about that?

21 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** One time, my mom was in
22 Fort Saskatchewan jail in -- well, after their -- like,
23 this was the year before. My brother had been shot, and I
24 wanted to try and tell my mom, and -- and I was trying to

1 figure out a way to be able to tell her, so I went to the
2 Fort Saskatchewan jail with her GST cheque, and that
3 was -- I was saying I was depositing it for canteen, and
4 that was how I was able to know she was there, and they
5 said, yeah, she was there, and I just gave the GST cheque,
6 and -- and then I told the -- I explained why I was there
7 and stuff, and they got the chaplain to tell my mom what
8 was going on, and that they allowed her to call, and I was
9 able to tell my mom what was going on and -- but, you know,
10 at the time when my mom went missing, like, when I went to
11 the Remand, I didn't even think of trying something like
12 that because I didn't have no -- no mail, no nothing
13 to -- you know, to even try that, and -- you know, like,
14 when somebody goes missing, you think, you know, there has
15 to be a way around that. You know, there has to be a
16 way -- when someone goes missing, how can you get around
17 that to be able to know if they're in the jail or -- or if
18 they're in the hospital or if they're, you know, somewhere?

19 Like -- especially for somebody like my mom
20 when -- like, she had memory loss from what had happened to
21 her, you know, what if they don't remember who they are?
22 How do you find them then? You know, like, do they
23 have -- like, we were talking yesterday about how, you
24 know, maybe the people that, like, have memory loss or

1 something, they should have something, a list of their
2 names, you know, that goes to the missing persons place
3 or -- you know, like -- because I had went out to Red Deer
4 one time. Like, I was calling around looking for my mom,
5 and my Uncle Lawrence works with the RCMP in Red Deer, and
6 at that time they said they found a woman, a Jane Doe,
7 the -- I think it was a mental institution or something
8 like that. I don't remember, but it was snowing like crazy
9 that day, like, such a bad snowstorm that I drove through
10 there with my brother and my kids' dad at the time, we were
11 together, and it was snowing like crazy, but I was
12 determined to find out who this woman was, and when I asked
13 the lady there what she looked like, could she describe
14 her, and -- so she told me, well, you know, she's got dark
15 brown hair, long, it's wavy, and she stands about 5 foot 4,
16 and -- you know, like, she's just -- I felt like she's
17 describing my mom. Like, that's how excited I was to drive
18 through a snowstorm to go see who this lady was. Didn't
19 remember her name, nothing.

20 And so we got there, and we went to the
21 wrong hospital, the first one, and then we went to the
22 other one, and we found it, and we came there, and they
23 said there was only one person allowed inside, and I had to
24 have my brother and José, they were waiting by the door,

1 and there was, like, at least three doors to go through to
2 get to where this lady was sitting, and I seen her hair.
3 You know, it was down, and I was -- my heart was beating
4 like crazy, and I was like, oh, my God, this is -- you
5 know, it must be my mom. You know, like -- and when
6 I -- like, because I seen her arm was on the wheelchair,
7 arm resting, and -- and I was, like -- couldn't see that
8 far because it was pretty far down the way, and when I got
9 to her, she was sitting by a window, and she turned -- they
10 turned her around. It was not my mom, and I was -- you
11 know, like, my heart dropped to the floor, and I was,
12 like -- but then, you know, I was always worried about this
13 woman, too, because, like, who does she belong to? What do
14 they -- what are they going to do with this women? You
15 know, like, they're -- you know. I still wonder, you know,
16 what happened to her, what -- you know? This is somebody's
17 mother or daughter or sister, you know.

18 And so after that, you know, like, I always
19 was searching for my mom continuously. Like, I made
20 pictures with -- you know, with my phone number on it, my
21 address, if you hear anything from her -- you know, we put
22 them all over downtown, and every time, like, I had a
23 holiday from work, that's what I was doing, and after maybe
24 the first three or four years, I started to realize we

1 weren't really enjoying our holiday because I was always,
2 like, if we have time, we're going to go look here.
3 Somebody would say, you know, like, oh, have you
4 tried -- you know, we went to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan,
5 we went to Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, we went to B.C.,
6 everywhere in B.C. We had a guy that we met in B.C. to
7 took us around to Surrey, Burnaby, you know, like, all
8 areas, this is where people hang out, and my kids always
9 remember that because they said -- like, we knew Vancouver
10 and surrounding area so well because we'd been there so
11 many times because it's such a big place, and -- you know,
12 like, we -- I was searching and searching and searching for
13 my mom, and -- I always had my kids with me. You know,
14 like, they would -- that -- they were my -- you know, my
15 rock to -- in the search for my mom, and they remember just
16 as much as I do, and yeah, to...

17 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** You said you
18 made posters and put them around town here. How did you go
19 about that, and did you have any help for that?

20 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** No. We just, like -- I
21 just made it on that Paint program on the computer. I just
22 put a picture of my mom, and I put if you know where my mom
23 is, and I had her name and my phone number on there, let me
24 know, and then -- sometimes I would get calls, and people

1 would be, like, oh, I know your mom, you know, I used to
2 party with her, and I'm like, well, do you know where she
3 is? No, I just wanted to say I knew your mom. Like -- and
4 it used to kind of make me mad because you know -- I used
5 to be, like, you know, this is no joke. Like, it's not
6 funny, and -- you know, we used to go downtown all the time
7 to -- we'd look for certain people she was hanging out
8 with, her friends. We'd go look for them, too, and
9 question them and say, oh, when you see my mom last, where
10 did you see her? And at that time, there was the
11 Eric Hotel (ph) downtown, and that's where -- she was
12 either there, or she was at this -- another bar. It's
13 called Milla's (ph) now I think. I can't remember what
14 it's called. They used to call it the Blue Nose, and
15 that's where I would go look, just places she would
16 frequent and, you know, hang out with her friends and
17 stuff, and -- a lot of the people that my mom knew have now
18 passed on, and -- which is quite -- you know, quite a bit,
19 and I don't see any of the other ones around. One of her
20 best friends, I only know one -- one remaining now, and all
21 the rest are -- have passed on, and -- you know, they were,
22 like, trying to be supportive, too, and they would, you
23 know, do their networking downtown and question other
24 people, hey, you knew her, and oh, I talked to whoever, and

1 this is what they told me, and we used to get a lot of
2 different stories, but we'd always try to, like, ask those
3 people or look for those people.

4 The Boyle Street Co-Op is another place my
5 mom would be, so -- you know, even today if I go there and
6 I know somebody there, that knew, me or my mom, they would,
7 you know, ask me, oh, have you heard anything? Have you
8 guys had any leads? Have you guys -- like, is there
9 anything? No, still nothing, and they just say, well, I
10 keep you in my prayers, they say, and hopefully one day you
11 find her.

12 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Throughout this
13 inquiry process, have you come across any materials that
14 have helped you in your search?

15 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** In the inquiry, no.
16 When -- you know, we all get -- when you go to the meeting,
17 you get a booklet from the inquiry, a binder full of
18 information, and on there it was, like -- there's things,
19 like, for when you're just first missing a person, it has
20 all that information, and I said, what do you -- what kind
21 of booklet do you have for someone who's been missing for
22 11 years? You know, like, what kind of stuff do you have
23 in there for -- you know, like, to me, I didn't really find
24 it helpful. You know, I needed something for now. Like,

1 it's been 11 years for me, and -- not just new, it's not
2 just -- you know, I -- I know I've done a lot of searching.
3 I've done everything I could, and even, like, we were going
4 to go to Kingston, Ontario, because back then you were
5 like, oh, there's a jail there, too, and did you guys go
6 there, my cousins would say, family would say, friends
7 would say; you know, they're, like -- I had Googled women's
8 jails and stuff. They're like, oh, there's one out in
9 Hobbema. There's, like, a -- when you get out of jail,
10 they send you there, or -- I don't know, so -- then I was,
11 like -- social media wasn't that big then. Google didn't
12 have as much information as it does now. Like, you can
13 find way more than when I was first searching for my mom,
14 and -- you know, I tried anything and everything. Like, I
15 even went to Alberta Hospital to see if my mom would be
16 there, and -- because of her memory loss and stuff, and
17 they actually -- like, they didn't -- like, they didn't
18 just turn me away. They said, we have to ask -- I don't
19 know if it was, like, a -- was it -- not the manager but
20 supervisor, somebody, they had to ask if they could even
21 tell us, like, if, you know, there was a patient there by
22 that name or not, or -- because, again, with *Freedom of*
23 *Information and Privacy*, there has to be, like -- you know,
24 they can't tell you stuff, and -- and because I said, you

1 know, that's my mom, and it's important because -- you
2 know, I've been looking for her for the past few months
3 now, I said, and I really need to know because of her
4 memory loss. I explained her condition, and she is very
5 frail even though she didn't like to admit it,
6 and -- because one -- one time my mom was on the bus, and
7 the bus had stopped, like, quickly, and she hit her head on
8 the pole, and the police brought her home to me. They said
9 they -- she was at the hospital, but they gave her a ride
10 home just to make sure she got home, and she couldn't even
11 remember us for, like, maybe even a week. My kids were,
12 like, Gammy (ph), and she'd, like -- she would just sit
13 there, and she was -- like, you could tell she was either
14 trying to remember or -- you know, my kids couldn't, like,
15 understand why my mom was like that, and I said, well, you
16 know what happened to her, and she can't remember a lot of
17 stuff, so just -- we'll just leave her, and finally after a
18 few days, she -- she was okay, and she started to remember
19 stuff and how she got home, and that's when I started to
20 notice, you know, like, she was very sensitive to -- like,
21 her head would be sensitive to any type of, like, bumps or
22 anything, so -- and that's what made me think when I had
23 looked for the -- went to see the lady in Red Deer, that's
24 why I thought, you know, possibility to be my mom because

1 memory loss and...

2 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Do you want to
3 talk about filing a missing persons report?

4 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** When I went in -- I had
5 went in January 2007 to file a missing persons report. I
6 went to file a missing persons report, and it -- when they
7 give you the paper, it tells you the name, age, height,
8 weight, and everything. You have to, like, give a
9 description, and so I stood there for at least an hour
10 writing out everything I could think of: Scars my mom had,
11 you know, like, things she had been through, had she been
12 in jail, yeah, she -- you guys should no her really well by
13 now, you know? They brought my mom home so many times, and
14 when I went to do the missing persons report, I brought it
15 to the desk, and the lady was reading through it, and she
16 told me that -- maybe give it a few days, and I was, like,
17 why, and -- like -- like, my thing was, like, isn't it,
18 like, 72 hours you can report a person missing, and -- you
19 know, like -- she was, like -- she didn't really say
20 anything about, like, the time and -- she said, well, you
21 know, your mom lived a high-risk lifestyle, so, you know,
22 maybe that's why you guys haven't seen her, so that was
23 kind of, like, a -- like, a kick in the face is how I
24 explained it because, you know, no matter what my mom did,

1 she's still a missing person. It -- you can't blame her
2 for -- you know, like, because we watch so much, like,
3 movies and things, and you see people just being stolen off
4 the street, you know, like, that's in your mind, right?
5 You just think, oh, well, what if somebody just grabbed her
6 and stole her? You know, you don't think, like, oh,
7 because -- you know, it's her fault for living that kind of
8 life that she -- you didn't -- you don't see her now.
9 Like, that's just not fair to me, but...

10 And it was, like -- I was really angry that
11 day when they told me it was her fault for living a
12 high-risk lifestyle, and yesterday I went back -- like, I
13 started counseling again because of this, and I was talking
14 with my counsellor about high risk. We were both upset
15 about that term. Like, a nurse who works night shift could
16 be a high-risk lifestyle. Somebody who -- you know, a gas
17 station employee who works night shift lives a high-risk
18 lifestyle because, you know, that -- it's, like -- it puts
19 them at risk for things to happen, and for them to say my
20 mom lived a high-risk lifestyle, which meaning she hangs
21 around down -- downtown, she drinks, whatever, that was
22 kind of what they were saying to me, and, you know,
23 like -- and yesterday when I discussed that, it was just,
24 like -- anybody can live a high-risk lifestyle:

1 Firefighter, anybody, you know, doctors, nurses, you know,
2 anyone, anyone and everyone, so why is it just they're
3 using that just for them? Like, I notice that a lot.
4 Like, when I read the articles in the news, oh, well, you
5 know, they had a high-risk lifestyle, or they were, like,
6 criminals before.

7 One of the articles I had, like -- like, I
8 save them in my Facebook, and I read -- I always come
9 across this one part in an article that says, well, they
10 had been involved with the police criminally. Like, the
11 young boy who was in Calgary, they didn't go check up on
12 him because of -- you know, he had been involved with the
13 police before and whatever, so -- so what? Because -- to
14 you guys he was a bad person, so you didn't go check up on
15 him? And, you know, I keep seeing that in a lot of the
16 articles, like, because of the person they were, that's why
17 they didn't -- the police didn't do a follow-up, and that's
18 just not right.

19 You know, I -- I've been reading through the
20 code of ethics and code of conduct for health workers,
21 social workers, police, you know, like -- and it says
22 people have to be, you know, treated with dignity, and
23 these people -- like, the police part that I read that
24 sticks in my mind is that regardless of their ethnicity and

1 stuff that they have to be treated with dignity, and the
2 police's job is to help the community. That's what they're
3 there for, to be -- make people feel safe and to do their
4 jobs as -- you know, workers in the -- with the community
5 because, you know, they work with anyone and everyone,
6 and -- you know, I read, like, these code of ethics and
7 stuff because -- I actually, like, went to court with a
8 case worker a few years ago, and she thought because she
9 wasn't registered with the ASCW (ph) that she didn't have
10 to follow the code of ethics, and -- yeah.

11 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** What does it
12 stand for?

13 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Alberta social
14 workers -- AS -- I can't remember what it's -- but Alberta
15 social workers, and they have a code of ethics for their
16 workers, and then there's a code of ethics for public
17 workers or people who work with the public or just Alberta
18 employees, and, you know, I always -- like, when I went to
19 court, I use that in court because she was trying to treat
20 me as if I was, like, some dumb little Native woman, and
21 you know, like, I told her, I said, you messed with the
22 wrong person, you know, and the judge was like, wow, good
23 for you, somebody did their homework, and you know, that's
24 a lot of the reason why, like, I read up on stuff like that

1 because, you know, when I was looking for my mom, I was,
2 like, trying to find -- I always say a loop for that
3 *Freedom of Information and Privacy Act*. You know, I -- I
4 was reading that, and I was like, there's got to be a way
5 around it, and -- you know, like, my mom's missing. There
6 has to be something more that can be done, and I try to
7 educate myself on stuff like that because, you know,
8 sometimes you don't think it's needed, and it comes in
9 handy when -- especially for stuff like this, and...

10 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Did you follow
11 up on the missing persons report after you initially filed
12 it?

13 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm. I had went -- I
14 had went, I think, in 2009 and 2010, and they just -- I was
15 told there was nothing. They haven't found anything. They
16 questioned people around downtown, and they haven't come
17 across anything, so I didn't know how -- like, I've never
18 had, like, to search for someone missing before, so I
19 didn't know how that went, and then I went again in 2012,
20 and they told me that I hadn't even filed a missing persons
21 report on my mom. They told me that I never filed anything
22 for my mom missing, so I didn't even know what to -- like,
23 I was already going through so much in that time because I
24 had lost my son a few months before, so I wasn't as strong

1 mentally or emotionally, and I just accepted that that day.
2 I was, like, I couldn't believe it. I just walked out of
3 the police station, and I felt like -- like, let down, kind
4 of, because, you know, you guys know my mom, I said. You
5 guys should know a lot about my mom. Like, you guys should
6 have a record and stuff, and -- and I know I did it because
7 after I lost my -- my son, I had lost my home and
8 everything because I had a breakdown, and I lost all my
9 papers and stuff, and my kids' dad had tried to take a lot
10 of the stuff, and I asked him, I said, you know, can you
11 look in your stuff -- the stuff that you took because he
12 had stored it at his sister's, and I kept that missing
13 persons report, the copy. It was in an envelope, and it
14 had my mom's name on it, and -- and I just kept thinking,
15 you know what, I know -- I know I did the -- the missing
16 persons report, and I was like, why would they say no? You
17 know, like, it just makes no sense, like, how they can come
18 say that after only, like, two years of doing that and -- I
19 was so mad because, you know, like, I have a criminal
20 record, and the police were more concerned about me than
21 they were of talking about my mom, and that really made me
22 angry because it was about my mom. It wasn't about me that
23 I went there for, and they were just saying, like, I hope
24 you're, you know, keeping good behavior or whatever, and I

1 just -- you know, when you don't have someone with you, you
2 don't have the support, you just think -- you know, the
3 police, they think they can do whatever they want and not
4 listen to you, and that makes me trust them so much less.

5 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Do you have any
6 comments on how you see police work, differences in police
7 work regarding missing Indigenous people versus others?

8 **MS. MURIEL WHITEMAN:** I think they're more
9 inclined to look for a white person than for a Native
10 person because right away they put them on TV whereas with
11 Native people they don't do that unless we push it
12 or -- you know, and they don't do their jobs in regards to
13 us.

14 I just want to read what I wrote this
15 morning. My sister Freeda was just one year older than me,
16 and my sister Kathleen was two years younger, so as
17 children we were best friends. As we came of age, we were
18 each sent to St. Joseph Residential School along with the
19 rest of my family, so we took up for each other and tried
20 to look after each other. They say trauma brings you
21 closer together, and being away from your parents at a very
22 young age is very traumatic. I remember running away
23 numerous times, and we all went there until we were teens.
24 After that, we lived with my mother, Irene, who was a

1 widow. My dad had died when I was around 6 or 7. I don't
2 recall the exact year. My parents had both went to
3 residential school also. My mom worked three jobs to make
4 ends meet, and seeing her work so hard gave us our work
5 ethic. When she walked on in 1976 from cancer, we were
6 lost, so I, Freeda, and Kat decided to move to our reserve.
7 We lasted around a year. We moved to Regina, and we all
8 started families. We then all moved to Saskatoon, and my
9 sister Kat moved to Edmonton where she was stabbed to death
10 by her common law in 1985. We had family here, so I and
11 then Freeda moved here to Edmonton. We didn't always hang
12 out together, but we were still those little girls in
13 residential school trying to look after each other.

14 I remember the last time I saw -- we saw
15 each other. It was the year we both went to Vanessa's and
16 sleep over. We slept on a sectional, one on each side,
17 whispering, laughing, and giggling early in the morning.
18 When Freeda went missing, I was lost again, because I
19 thought my sisters and I would grow old together, and here
20 I am growing old by myself.

21 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** You know, my mom -- my
22 kids really miss my mom. They're all adults now, and not
23 having her in our life is like -- it's not good. Like,
24 when I became a grandmother myself for the first time, and

1 I have no one to really share it with, and I was so proud
2 thinking, you know, my mom would have been so happy, you
3 know, to be a great grandma because she always used to take
4 my kids everywhere. Like, my mom would, like, go to
5 Bissell Centre Christmas party, she would take my kids, you
6 know, they would come back with stuff. My kids always talk
7 about that every Christmas. They would talk about, like,
8 Easter parties, Halloween parties; oh, you know, Gammy took
9 us here yesterday, you know? We went and we got candies
10 and -- you know, like, always -- and they would always,
11 like that, start reminiscing on those -- at those times.

12 You know, I was talking about my mom and how
13 she would -- you know, if she knew of an event in town that
14 was free, and, you know, it -- and kids would get stuff
15 like balloons, candies, or, you know, stickers and stuff,
16 you know, my kids would be, like, so happy for things like
17 that. My mom would always take them, even when they would
18 get a little bit older and they thought they were too big
19 for stuff like that, my mom would still encourage them to,
20 like, live life and have fun, and let's go do this,
21 and -- you know, like -- my two older daughters always used
22 to, like, refuse, and she'd -- come on, don't be like that,
23 and let's just go, and they would go, and they would have
24 fun, and they would come back, and they'd be all happy

1 because, you know, they went, you know? If Gammy didn't
2 tell me to go, I wouldn't have gone, you know?

3 One of my daughters had one, like, a
4 little -- like, a gift basket or whatever, and she was
5 like, so proud because it had, like -- it was Easter, and
6 it was, like, had lots of chocolate and stuff, and, oh,
7 if -- see, if you didn't go, you wouldn't have won that,
8 she said, and that was, like, you know, their memories of,
9 you know, being with my mom and -- you know, my mom
10 always -- always thought of my children and everyone else's
11 children. Like, if she was, like, somewhere where, like,
12 they were giving away free clothes, she would, like, pick
13 clothes for everybody's kids, not just mine. She'd be
14 like, oh, this is for so-and-so's kid, and she was like,
15 give it to them, and -- you know, I -- you know, even a
16 friend of mine was, like, I can't believe your mom thought
17 of even my kids, you know? Like, your mom is so
18 thoughtful, and -- you know, she was. She was always,
19 like, thinking of everyone, and that's how I -- that's how
20 I am now. Like, I grew up to be that way.

21 And, you know, like, with my mom being in
22 residential school, she never had a lot of, like, parenting
23 skills, but she did the best that she could and the best
24 that she knew. She'd always say, this is what my mom

1 taught me, this is what my mom said, or she would -- like,
2 my Aunty Bernice is the oldest, and she would, like -- she
3 would say, oh, I learned stuff from Bernice, too,
4 and -- you know, like -- my mom always used to tell me,
5 like, oh, if -- when you're older, you have to keep
6 our -- like, our culture -- try to learn everything you
7 can. When somebody's doing a ceremony, pay attention. She
8 always used to tell me that when I was little, and she
9 said, I never learned a whole lot about -- never learned a
10 whole lot about it, but she said I used to pay attention
11 when people would do ceremonies or have any, like, feasts
12 or gatherings, and those are words today that I use in my
13 own children, and they -- you know, for my daughters to
14 learn a lot from how our -- like, how our people are.
15 Like, we were losing the culture, and I'm -- I try to keep
16 it alive with my children, and I try to practice, you know,
17 as much of it as I can, you know, because I never grew up
18 on the reserve, and that was something my mom was always,
19 like -- she'd always have sweet grass, she'd always
20 have -- you know, she had this red piece of cloth that she
21 hung up on my wall, and it had the eagle feather and a
22 braid of sweet grass in a circle, and it was tied, and she
23 used to say that was protection for our home, and you
24 cannot bring any negativity, drugs, alcohol into the home,

1 she would say, and -- and I would always keep that in mind,
2 and -- you know, to -- to learn stuff from my mom because I
3 thought my mom would grow old with me, too, and -- you
4 know, she'd be this little old lady, and we used to joke
5 about how she was going to have little *kookum* dresses and
6 stuff, and my kids were, like, oh, yeah, we'll just be
7 driving her around and everything instead of her just
8 taking the bus to go downtown to her little events and
9 stuff, and we'd be driving her there, and -- you know, we
10 would joke about stuff, about how we would be waiting for
11 her, and she'll just be taking her time, and, you know,
12 like -- we always believed that, like, that's how our life
13 would be and how would she be now, you know?

14 Like, my mom was my -- no matter
15 what -- what I went through or what she went through in our
16 lives, we were always there for each other, and my kids
17 always -- you know, like, something will remind them of my
18 mom. Like, my mom liked Obsession perfume, so if we were
19 walking through the Bay or something and you'd get a whiff
20 of that smell, that's the first thing that -- oh, well,
21 smells like, you know, Gammy here, and -- you know, like,
22 things like -- like, if we're somewhere, I notice they
23 always, like, would have a memory of my mom, and it was
24 really, like, hard -- it was really hard in the first few

1 years to always hear my kids say, oh, what if, you know,
2 Gammy was here, we'd -- we'd be there right now, or we'd
3 have this and -- you know, like -- instead, we were always
4 on the go, looking for her. It wasn't the same anymore,
5 and they really missed that.

6 Like, they missed, like, the soup my mom
7 would make, and when my mom would make bannock, they would
8 miss stuff, like -- like, my mom used to do this -- it's
9 kind of like a secret Santa but just with, like, my kids.
10 Like, she's like, oh, you guys have to love each other as a
11 family, and so you're going to, like, pick something for
12 her, and you're going to pick something for your brother,
13 and -- you know, she would do stuff like that with them
14 because she said you guys have to learn to respect each
15 other as a family and that you guys have to look out for
16 one -- each other as a family, and she always, like, would
17 do that all the time.

18 We'd have, like -- if we had a meal, like,
19 Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter dinner, we have what we
20 call spirit dishes, and they -- she would make my kids do
21 the spirit dish because she said you have to learn how to
22 do this, too, and, you know, say a prayer, and you're
23 feeding our -- you know, our relations in the spirit world,
24 and, you know, my kids still do that. Even on their own,

1 they're living on their own, and they still do that when
2 they have their -- their dinners and stuff, and that's
3 something they -- you know, that they learned from my mom,
4 and -- you know, I'm thankful for a lot of the stuff that
5 they do on their own that -- you know, like, I never taught
6 them, but my mom did and -- you know, that's -- that's the
7 stuff we miss. You know, her and her -- her teachings and
8 trying to always encourage our culture to keep going within
9 the family.

10 My oldest daughter always remembers, my mom
11 made her a traditional outfit that she was -- she was
12 dancing pow-wow. My mom took her to the pow-wow in
13 Poundmaker's, and she won \$5 for Tiny Tots, and she said
14 that's one of the strongest memories she has, and -- and I
15 told her, I said, you know, those kind of memories bring
16 smiles to your face and good thoughts and make you feel
17 good inside, and that's how we should remember her always,
18 for things like that.

19 It's a -- it's -- you know, it's hard not
20 having my mom around because, you know, like, going through
21 things in my life where I needed my mother, it wasn't easy,
22 and my brother had passed on, and we -- you know, in my
23 mind, it's, like, the parent -- that's the parent's job to
24 bury their child. I never thought it was my job because,

1 you know, I'm the sister, but -- you know it was the
2 biggest thing I ever learned in my life. I've never had a
3 funeral or had been to one since my Aunt Kathy passed away,
4 so I didn't really know every single thing that you have to
5 do, so when it was time to bury my brother, I was,
6 like -- I wished that my mom was there, and she would know
7 what to do, I thought, but you know, I was there, and I
8 managed to get everything that needed to be done for a
9 traditional Dakota burial, and that was one of the biggest
10 things I've ever learned in my life, and that was -- you
11 know, we need our parents there for that, and -- well, I
12 thought, and -- you know, I did it.

13 And another time, I really, really -- I
14 needed my mom when my son passed away. I remember being at
15 the hospital, and when they told me he'd passed away, I
16 yelled out for my mom, and I don't know why I had that
17 reaction when I knew she wasn't there, but that's who I
18 needed at the time, and even the nurse came in, and she's
19 like, oh, do you want anybody we can call for you? And I
20 didn't even know what to say because she's, like, is
21 your -- maybe call your mom, maybe the grandparents? I was
22 like, I don't have any, and she was, like, oh, I'm sorry I
23 asked that question, and -- you know, with things like
24 that, that's when I need my mom the most, and I didn't have

1 her, and I always wish, you know, for that, to have my mom.
2 You know, and to have my mom missing, and I feel like
3 people don't understand. Like, there are so many things
4 you go through in life that you want your -- your mom there
5 because that's your mom. That's who -- you know, if you
6 needed a big hug, that's who you would run to. If you felt
7 sad, that's who you go to, your mom when you have your mom,
8 and I never really had my dad in my life, and it was such a
9 hard time because -- a hard time in my life when my son
10 passed away, and the day I buried my son, my dad passed
11 away, and it made it even harder, and you know, my dad was
12 dying, and he was alone because everybody was at the
13 funeral for my son, and then -- you know, my dad was here
14 in the hospital, and I just laid down to -- to rest, and
15 they called me and said, oh, your dad passed away. You
16 know, for -- and again, I felt, like, I wish I had my mom,
17 you know, for stuff like that, and -- like, how would it be
18 if my mom was there? You know, I maybe would feel a little
19 bit more strength and maybe not, but at least I would have
20 had my mom there, and I always wish -- you know, like, when
21 people have their -- they always say, oh, when you
22 have -- always tell someone you love them because you never
23 know if you'll see them tomorrow or -- and, you know, I
24 always think about stuff like that every day.

1 After my mom went missing, I used to tell my
2 kids when they would go to school: See you, love you, have
3 a good day. Every single day they would get out of the
4 car, and they would go to school, that was what I would
5 tell my kids, and they started saying it because I said it
6 so much that when they got out of the car, they're like,
7 yeah, yeah, we -- you're going to say see you, love you,
8 have a good day. And I'm like, yeah, because, you know,
9 like, ever since Gammy went missing, you know, like, maybe
10 I should have told her I loved her more often, maybe I
11 should have, you know, said something, you know, like that,
12 and -- but because my mom was in residential school, there
13 were a lot of things she never learned, and -- to hug and
14 to tell you "I love you" was hard for her. She tried to
15 say it often as she could, but she -- it wasn't said as
16 much as I would have liked to have heard, but that's why I
17 tell my kids and everybody around me. I always tell
18 them -- you know, if I visit and I'm leaving, I'll say,
19 okay, love you guys, and, you know, see you later,
20 and -- you know, that's something I've been doing since my
21 mom went missing, and, you know, like, my kids now say it.
22 Other people -- like, friends say they say that now,
23 and -- because they always say, you never know, and -- and
24 that's how I've seen it since my mom's been missing is you

1 never expect to be that person who's searching for a
2 missing loved one, and you never think you're going to be
3 going through something like this in life.

4 And when -- when I'm on social media, if I
5 see a missing person, like, was missing within a few -- few
6 days, I share the post. I share almost every single post.
7 Like, it's just -- and I say a prayer for that person, and
8 I recently had my friend's son Keenan (ph), he was missing
9 for almost eight days. He had come from B.C. on the bus,
10 and his mom said that he went to his sister's and he left
11 and he was going back to B.C., and that was the last they
12 heard of him, and it just so happened I went to the first
13 meeting with the inquiry, and I had asked people there if
14 they could help, and they said, yeah, for sure, we're going
15 to help you right away, and give us her -- the mom's number
16 and everything, and to this day we don't know how he got
17 back to B.C. because he did not take the bus. He didn't
18 take a plane. He -- we don't know how he got back there.
19 He was really -- his sister found him outside sleeping in
20 the bushes by her apartment, and he was all dirty and
21 everything and still had the clothes on he had left in,
22 and -- but he was -- you know, when he was found, I put on
23 social media, you know, we found him, and -- and it counts
24 how many shares you have on there, so I had more than a

1 hundred thousand shares within those few days, three days,
2 I believe it was, and -- you know, like, I always think
3 about some of the ideas, when someone goes missing, you
4 know, and I -- I always think about, like, if -- with
5 social media today, it's very easy to put, you know, a
6 posting out there for someone who's missing, and I had a
7 friend who found -- she has -- she had a 10-year-old son
8 went skateboarding one Saturday by himself and met up with
9 some other kids, and if it wasn't for social media, they
10 wouldn't have found him. Like, some kid that didn't even
11 know him, his mom was looking on buy and sell, and she seen
12 a picture of her -- the boy, and she was like, oh,
13 that -- this kid was with mine earlier today, and I didn't
14 know he was missing, she said, but he -- you know, he's 10
15 years old, and -- stuff like that I wish we had in 2006
16 when my mom went missing. You know, maybe someone or
17 anyone would have heard something, or -- I didn't know too
18 much about computers then, and the Paint program was so
19 easy to just, like, put my mom's picture on there, type in
20 all the stuff, and print it out, and that was all I had to
21 use, and -- you know, like, driving around and searching
22 for my mom, and now that we have so many other things, but
23 my thing is, like -- for my belief is, like, if you ask the
24 police for -- to search for missing people, you think they

1 have this big network; like, oh, we can check here, check
2 there. That's how I see the police, but when you go to
3 them and they don't even try to do anything, it felt
4 like -- it's, like, what do you do, you know? You feel
5 helpless when you don't have -- like, you don't have that
6 authority to go here, go there to look because of, again,
7 the *Freedom of Information and Privacy Act* is -- there has
8 to be something for -- for us to be able to look for our
9 loved ones, you know? Has to be something that can be done
10 because you do feel helpless. You really do. You don't
11 know where to start. You don't know what to do except for,
12 you know, like, from what you see -- like, if you watch a
13 movie and you see, like, oh, this person's missing, all of
14 a sudden they have dogs, you know, sniffing the ground
15 looking for this person, they have all, like, AP whatever.
16 Like, you just have that in your mind. You think that's
17 what's going to happen when somebody, you know, goes
18 missing, but none of that happened. Nothing really happens
19 because they're too busy waiting, and I always think, what
20 are they waiting for? How is somebody who's been stolen,
21 murdered, or anything like that just going to come
22 in -- you know, come back?

23 Like -- like, you're -- when you're hurt and
24 going through this kind of pain, your brain tries to

1 understand. It's trying to figure out, you know, what can
2 you do? What do you do? You know, I always ask myself
3 if -- if somebody stole me, what would I do? You know,
4 if -- you know? Just so many things.

5 You know, every -- I always, like, think of
6 stuff, and I forget to write it down because I think it's a
7 good idea at the moment. Like, they should just
8 automatically have GPS things on phones, like, for
9 everyone. Doesn't matter if you turn it on or off. It
10 should just be automatic, like, you know? I don't know how
11 to explain it, but -- I don't know, you just -- even with
12 the inquiry, I was talking last night about -- like, if you
13 have -- can you make, like, a booklet with all of
14 everybody's, like, ideas and recommendations and stuff, so
15 if we left anything out, that's how I feel. Like, you
16 know, are we being listened to?

17 And I was saying this morning, too, about
18 how -- when I first heard about the inquiry, I was
19 thinking, oh, good, you know, they're going to help me find
20 my mom. That was, you know, not realistic, but that was
21 the first thing -- the thought -- first thought that came
22 to mind was, oh, about time, you know? It only took
23 11 years, I thought to myself. But, you know, it's
24 not -- it's my 11 years. You know, I've been waiting for

1 this, something like this. Other people, it's longer;
2 other people, it's less, you know, but it's -- you still
3 have that, finally, somebody is going to hear my story
4 about my mom. Somebody's going to know, you know, she was
5 a sister, she was a mother, she was a grandmother, she was
6 a daughter, she was someone to us. She belonged to us.

7 And I always think, you know, like, the
8 police have to understand that what if it was your family
9 member? How would you would go about it? Maybe because
10 you're the police, you have more -- more connection or more
11 say to something, but as my aunty was saying, it -- it is
12 true. If you are, like, Aboriginal, they just stereotype
13 everybody and they think, oh, you know what, they're
14 criminals, they're, you know, drunks, they're drug addicts,
15 they're, you know, not good people. They just assume
16 they're all the same, and we're not. You know, there are
17 some that are -- you know, they're sober, they're
18 non -- they're -- they don't use drugs, they don't use
19 alcohol, they're -- you know, they work -- you know,
20 they're trying to, you know, be on the right path in life,
21 and -- but people choose to see -- like, society chooses to
22 see most of the time the negative of people. I notice that
23 in a lot of, like, comments and -- that I read: Oh,
24 this -- if she didn't go do that, she wouldn't be missing.

1 You know, like, what do you know?

2 Like -- you know, you read the comments, and
3 people say, oh, you play the race card; oh, you do this;
4 you guys think because of this inquiry you are -- you're
5 going to get treated better or more special, and -- reading
6 those kind of comments, like, that just angers me because
7 it's not right. It's -- we're missing a loved one. We've
8 had someone that's been missing for a long time. We just
9 want some kind of closure or help in finding them, and
10 reading comments like that is just, like -- I don't want to
11 say, you know what, you be in my shoes or -- I had read a
12 few years ago there was this woman who was complaining on
13 this comment about a young woman went missing, and she
14 said, oh, yeah, well, if she wasn't partying around, this
15 wouldn't have happened to her, you know? You young
16 girls -- young Native girls like to go out and be stupid,
17 and your parents have no control and stuff. That was her
18 comment on the -- on the article, and I told her, I said,
19 bite your tongue, be careful what you say because, you
20 know, this can happen to anyone, and I had kept
21 her -- like, I -- her name in mind, and a few -- few years
22 later, I see the same woman commenting on -- on this
23 article, and she said -- a few years back, she was
24 complaining about, you know, a girl going missing, and she

1 was Native, and she said, I'm sorry I ever said that
2 because my son is now missing, and she said is that called
3 kharma or something? Like, she was asking for people to
4 say something, and -- and she was just getting a bunch of
5 supportive words from, like, Aboriginal people saying, you
6 know, pray for your child's return, pray for -- you know,
7 not -- no negative comments, like, oh, good for you, type
8 of thing, like some people would say. You know, I was
9 like, you know, there's that big difference with our people
10 and white people, so to say is, like, you have to be
11 careful when you're saying something because it can come
12 back to you. That's, you know, how I grew up, so if you
13 can't -- we're always told, like, if you can't say nothing
14 nice, don't say it at all, and when people are commenting,
15 I always -- it doesn't matter what it's about. If it turns
16 negative, I throw my little two cents in there, and I say
17 be careful what you say because it will come back to you,
18 and that's just my way of thinking is I try to be kind to
19 others because you don't know what they're going through.

20 I myself have been trying to practice being,
21 like, less judgmental of people and try to be more
22 understanding of their situation and stuff, and I wish
23 people would show me that as I look for my mom or continue
24 to look for my mom, and -- after I lost my son, I kind of

1 lost that fight in me to keep doing what I was doing, and
2 that was still looking for my mom, and now I feel like I
3 have that strength back, and to have this inquiry going on,
4 that's my -- you know, a -- like, my -- I always -- they
5 got my back, so to say. They're there for us, and I
6 appreciate that because this is a long time waiting
7 and -- you know, I've been hoping for something like this
8 for so long, and now the day is finally here, I said to
9 myself this morning, and I'm glad for that, and I just hope
10 that it continues on afterwards. Like, I need to know that
11 even though we have -- like, I have my story to say today,
12 that what is the follow-up going to be? Like, is there
13 more to it than just what we're doing here today? Like, is
14 it going to be, like -- if you have, like, a 5-step process
15 is how I'm seeing it, like, that's how I would think it
16 would be. Like, this is the first part, the second part,
17 the third part, and we're going to keep going and -- you
18 know, until something comes of it, and I don't want to be
19 just left hanging in the dark. Like, I need to know that
20 it's going to keep going, and -- like, I want to -- like,
21 if -- if my mom's records and stuff and everything is going
22 to be used, then can we know about that too? Like, can we
23 keep -- can you still keep us informed about what's going
24 on, and I know there's so many families and so much work to

1 be done, but even if it was, like, just one update, you
2 know, don't be like the police and say, oh, we're going to
3 be there for you, and then you come and -- like, you come
4 once and then that's it, and we don't hear from you for
5 11 years. You know, like, I want more than what -- I
6 expect more than what the police have done. I expect more
7 involved -- involvement in all of this inquiry stuff,
8 and...

9 Like, I was feeling really rushed through
10 this situation too. Like, I got a call in July, and then I
11 have a meeting in September, and then now today we're here.
12 You know, it's a -- to me, it's a really fast process, and
13 I hope the Government doesn't see it as that's their good
14 deed to us in helping us. I want them to see, you know
15 what, you have to be there. You made that promise, now
16 keep it from this day until whenever, not just -- I don't
17 want to see it as, like, a Band-Aid or -- type of thing,
18 so -- like, a lot of the stuff -- like, for myself today, I
19 probably would have been more prepared if I knew, you know,
20 what was expected here because I had no idea, and even
21 though I have been through, like -- like, we go to marches
22 and stuff, and we bring the poster, Matthew brings it, and
23 we talk about my mom. Like, at City Hall, they had a
24 meeting there, and -- you know, you talk about your loved

1 one that's been missing, and you share your story with
2 other people that are sharing their story, and you need to
3 prepare for some -- for stuff like that. It's not easy to
4 just be able to, like, just come here and say, oh, my mom's
5 missing, she's been missing for 11 years. You know,
6 there's -- I know there's more to it, but I never expected,
7 like, it would be like this today, so a little bit more
8 time to prepare would have been better for me, and -- this
9 morning I couldn't even write anything. Last night I
10 couldn't write anything. My mind was in a blank. I just
11 wanted to say what I have to say, and -- and just not feel
12 angry about being rushed.

13 And it takes a lot for somebody to be able
14 to come here and talk about, you know, their missing loved
15 one and -- or their murdered loved one or whoever they're
16 talking about at that moment, and when I first came out
17 this morning, I was so nervous feeling that I just wanted
18 to burst out in tears, and at the last meeting, like, I had
19 cried for days before because it's, like, you have all this
20 sadness. For 11 years, I've been holding it here. It
21 feels like -- at the first meeting, my chest was so heavy I
22 felt like I couldn't even breathe, and then when I actually
23 got into that room and sat down and talked with them, I
24 felt like it was all going away, that for that 11 years,

1 searching and feeling that sadness, I can finally let it go
2 and have someone else carry some of it for me because it's
3 not easy holding that in your heart and hoping and praying
4 that you're going to find them.

5 You know, when I -- if I'm driving and I see
6 a woman that looks like my mom, I'll stop and I'll turn
7 around and I'll go see, you know, maybe it's her, or if I
8 just see someone who looks like my mom, I just -- you know,
9 it brings memories, it brings pain, it brings sadness, and
10 you just wish and wish.

11 Sometimes I feel like, you know, my mind is
12 in the clouds because I just fantasize about finding my mom
13 and things being okay and life going on, and it's not going
14 to happen, and I don't know. Maybe one day it will. You
15 know, like, I see stuff about -- in the news about women
16 and, like, being held captive; oh, they got out of this
17 house, and I think, oh, what if my mom's in one of those
18 houses? And then I think about, like, they were
19 trafficking women, and they managed to -- like, somebody
20 caught them, and they were all let go and -- you know,
21 things like that, I just -- you can't help but have those,
22 you know, thoughts in your head because you're hopeful, and
23 it's better to stay hopeful than to be negative and giving
24 up because a lot of the times I felt like, you know what, I

1 give up, and -- and then I think, you know, would my mom
2 want me to give up on her? No, she wouldn't.

3 You know, like, I've thought about having a
4 memorial, but I can't -- I don't have it in me to do it
5 because I think, you know what, that's just letting her go,
6 to me. That's already putting my mom to rest. That's how
7 I see, and we don't know for sure if my mom is alive out
8 there somewhere or if she's already, you know, not here. I
9 don't know that, and my biggest fear is finding out that
10 she's been murdered and deceased, you know, because I
11 always hear other stories. Like, every time I hear
12 something in the news about, oh, they found the remains of,
13 you know, someone, I just get this ugly -- this ugly
14 feeling in my chest and I feel sick, and I can't eat that
15 day because I'm waiting to find out what they're going to
16 say in the news.

17 They had found a woman out by Fort
18 Saskatchewan a few years ago, and she fit the description
19 of my mom, too, but they couldn't tell if she was
20 Aboriginal or Asian decent, they had said, and it took,
21 like, a week, I think, for them to find something out, and
22 all that time, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, and it's
23 things like that that trigger that hurt and that pain again
24 and that worry and that, oh, my God, you know, like, what

1 if that's her? What am I going to do? You know? So I
2 have to pray, and I have to smudge, and -- you know, I
3 just, I -- it's hard not to think that way because, you
4 know, like, you don't know. You have no idea
5 where -- where they are.

6 You know, I heard about the -- the farm or
7 whatever, the ranch somewhere in B.C. near Salmon Arm where
8 they had found the remains of some women there, and even
9 with that, I was having a hard time to sleep because I
10 needed to know more. I needed to know, like, anything, you
11 know? Like, I've had people tell me, oh, you shouldn't
12 think that way, but it's hard not to. It's hard not to
13 think, you know, like, what if? They say don't think
14 negative, but do you know what? When our women go missing,
15 there's a lot of negativity involved in why they went
16 missing. It wasn't just because, oh, they wanted to go
17 missing. No. It's not a fun thing. It's a bad thing.
18 You know, like, how are you -- how can you not see it as
19 negative?

20 And I myself know that, you know, the way my
21 mom was, that it's a possibility. It could have, you know,
22 turned out that way, and maybe not. It's hard to say
23 because my mom was, like -- I've seen my mom in a few
24 situations where she could talk herself out of it without

1 problem, and that's why I think, you know, like, my mom was
2 a smart one, and she could have talked her way out of any
3 situation and still go on and -- go on about her day
4 and -- but then I think about, like, other things. You
5 know, she was always, like, a risky person. She didn't
6 care sometimes, and -- and that would all stem from, like,
7 not knowing things and growing up the way she did. Like,
8 they were sheltered in a residential school, they were fed
9 there, clothed there, you know, taught, educated there, and
10 for them to, like, come out of there and just live life
11 wasn't easy for my mom, and she said -- she all -- she
12 always used to say, every day is a new learning experience.
13 You learn something new every day, and she said -- and then
14 she would tell me a story about how she learned how to,
15 like -- how people were telling them to apply for, like,
16 social assistance or -- oh, I didn't even know how you
17 could do that, and -- she would tell me about how her
18 friend was saying, oh, you guys have to open a bank account
19 and -- things like that, they never teach you in
20 residential school. They never really teach you anything,
21 she said. They just let you out into the world, and
22 you're -- you're done being in the residential school.

23 You know, my mom always used to like to
24 travel to -- just to see things differently, like, little

1 reserves and stuff, and that's where I thought -- when she
2 had went missing, I thought maybe she was off to some
3 reserve just to see because one time when I was, like, 15,
4 she went to this Driftpile reserve, and she was over there
5 for a week, but I was so worried about her because I didn't
6 see her, and finally she phoned me. She said, I'm stuck
7 over here, and she said, oh, I'll be back later and maybe
8 in a few days or whatever, and you know, I always kept that
9 in mind when my mom would go somewhere or go out,
10 and -- but one thing my mom always used to say when she'd
11 go somewhere, like, if she had a new boyfriend, she'd be,
12 like, oh, this is his phone number, he lives in this house,
13 and this is where he lives and whatever. She always used
14 to tell me that all the time, and I used to think, why is
15 she telling me this, and then I was like, oh, it's for her
16 safety, but when you're young and you're, like, 14,
17 and -- and that age, you don't really think anything of
18 stuff like that, so -- and, you know, I -- I always talk
19 about that on my Facebook; like, tell your children to
20 always let you know where they are, like -- and I always
21 tell my own children, and, like, you get free Wi-Fi
22 everywhere nowadays. How can you not communicate? Like,
23 they're -- it's everywhere. Like, even McDonalds is free.
24 Tim Hortons is free. You know, like, go there, you know?

1 And I always tell them, don't work at
2 nights. Like -- you know, I -- I read through some of the
3 stuff they say for prevention of being missing or anything,
4 you know, tell someone where you're going. It doesn't
5 matter who it is, tell someone, and you know, even if,
6 like, my daughter doesn't want to say, oh, I'm going to go
7 to a party, well, tell your sister if you think I'm going
8 to be mad. Tell your sister. But they're older now, and
9 they think they don't have to tell anyone, and I said I
10 don't care if you're, like, in your 30s, 40s, 50s and
11 you're going to a party, you have to let someone know. I
12 don't care how old you are. If you're going to travel
13 somewhere, tell someone, and that's a little bit of what I
14 learned from my mom, what I picked up without knowing.
15 That's for safety, and I just -- yeah, I think that's all I
16 had to -- it's getting -- did you want to say anything?

17 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** As you were
18 speaking today, there were some photographs on the screens
19 behind us. Did you want to talk about those photos?

20 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** This one is at my
21 aunty's graduation, and there is more of us in the picture,
22 but I just wanted to have my mom up there. We were there
23 for my aunty graduating, and it was a good day that day.
24 She was all smiling.

1 And that's my second-oldest daughter,
2 Deandra (ph), who's now 22, and that was at Christmas time.
3 We had those little -- you know those firecrackers you get,
4 you open, you get a hat inside? Yeah, my mom had hers on,
5 and they didn't have one that fit my daughter, so she put
6 that on her, and she was, like, just happy because she had
7 something on her head.

8 And that's another Christmas party with
9 my -- with my -- at my Aunty Bernice's farm out in
10 Wetaskiwin, and everybody -- there was other people in
11 there, a lot of other people in -- we always used to go out
12 there for Christmas because they can make as much noise for
13 the kids and for the adults.

14 And there, just -- she's -- I can't remember
15 what she was saying there, and she was visiting at my
16 house. My mom always used to, like, stay with me and -- or
17 my brother, and majority of the time she was living with
18 me, and -- or she'd be, like, oh, I don't want to be a
19 burden, and so she'd, like, get her own place for a while,
20 and she'd get lonely and come back and say it's not easy to
21 live without her grandbabies, and -- she always had
22 somebody, like, sitting with her and -- you know, my kids
23 always used to, like, hug my mom's arms when she'd watch TV
24 and, you know, hang onto her all the time, and if I

1 was -- if I couldn't do something for them, like, I was
2 busy, like, doing laundry, they'd, you know, be bugging my
3 mom, oh, can you make us this, can you cook us that? Oh,
4 you didn't make your soup lately, can you make your soup,
5 and -- oh, Gammy makes better bannock than Mom does, and
6 then -- they'd always want my mom to make it and not me and
7 stuff like that. Like, there were certain things she would
8 feed them, and they learned, like, cooking stuff from them.

9 I remember one of my nieces was saying the
10 other day, she said, I miss your mom so much, she said,
11 because when I first learned how to cook, she said, she
12 learned me how to crack an egg and fry eggs, and she was
13 like, I think I was only, like, 6, and -- and it's, like,
14 good to hear stuff like that because, you know, that's what
15 keeps her memory living on, and that helps us, you know,
16 when we're coping with it and -- and for a while there,
17 because I -- for a while, I wasn't, like, looking at
18 pictures, and I was forgetting her laugh. I was forgetting
19 her voice and her face and I would, like -- I actually put
20 my phone screen saver with my mom's picture, and my
21 youngest daughter is 7, and she never met my mom.

22 And that's my mom when she was in high
23 school. That's in 1973. You know, I posted this picture
24 on Facebook, and everybody told me how beautiful she is and

1 how my kids look a lot like her, and one of the hardest
2 things with my 7-year-old was, like -- my granddaughter was
3 saying, oh, my grandma, hanging on my arm and my daughter
4 said, you're so lucky you have a grandma, I don't have one
5 of those, and she started to cry, and that really hurt
6 because, you know, she doesn't understand stuff like that,
7 and she doesn't understand how someone can just -- you
8 know, she's 7, and she said, how can somebody steal your
9 mom? Your mom was big. She's -- she wasn't a small girl.
10 Anyhow, that's what she thinks because that's what
11 "missing" means to kids is somebody stole them, and I asked
12 her, I said, why do you think -- why do you think that?
13 And she said, everybody who's missing is
14 somebody -- because somebody stole them. It's because
15 somebody -- she thinks because somebody didn't like them
16 and they stole them, and I told her that's not -- sometimes
17 that's not how it is, and she said, no, has to be like
18 that. Why would somebody steal your mom?

19 And she was happy because my aunty told her,
20 you know what, you don't have a grandma, but I'm your
21 grandma, and that really helped her a lot, because she
22 said, yeah, I do have a grandma, and then my Aunty Bernice,
23 too, when we went to visit her, she said, I'm your grandma,
24 too, because your grandma was my sister, and we're all

1 grandmas. We're all grandmothers together, she said, so
2 you have a lot of grandmas, she said, and for my 7-year-old
3 to hear that, it was a lot, and she was happy, and she
4 always said, I thought only kids can have one grandma, you
5 can't have more than one. I said, no, there -- I have a
6 lot of aunties, I said. I have a lot of uncles and a lot
7 of, you know, family that you -- so no, you have a lot of
8 grandmas, I said, and that one, too, I said, and my mom
9 will always be your grandma no matter what.

10 And then she said maybe one day -- she had
11 lost two teeth last week, and she said I'm going to keep my
12 teeth to show my grandma they fell out, and I said -- it's
13 weird because she just says random stuff like that, and
14 that's another thing that keeps me hopeful in finding my
15 mom. A part of that is, like, you know, I'm going to find
16 my mom so -- so my daughter can have her grandma.

17 And this picture is of my -- my uncle and my
18 mom. When I was asked at the -- at the meeting, the first
19 meeting, Karen had asked me about -- if my -- my mom's
20 siblings were involved in looking for her, and I said, just
21 my Aunty Muriel and my Uncle Richard, and I said, you know,
22 they were the two closest ones to my mom, and she had asked
23 about other -- other family, if they were involved, and I
24 said, some of them were, some of them weren't, and I had

1 talked recently with my Aunty Bernice, and she said that
2 she was sorry that she wasn't there to help because she
3 didn't really know how to go about that. Like, it was
4 shocking for her to even find out my mom was missing,
5 and -- and she lived in B.C., and she's getting older and,
6 you know, unable to be mobile and stuff, and she said if I
7 were younger, then I would have done more, but I'm too old
8 now, and I -- it's not easy for me to even get around, she
9 said, and I said, no, that's okay, and -- you know, like,
10 as long as -- you know, I know I'm looking for her, that's
11 all that matters, you know, and my kids are the same way.
12 Like, they still, like, want to continue looking for my
13 mom, and we always -- you know, we plan little things,
14 like, oh, we're going to go here and look here, and you
15 know, we still have that hope that maybe she's got, like,
16 amnesia or something, you know, that's -- or I don't know.
17 You know, we just -- it's things like that that make us
18 stay looking for her and not to give up and not to stop.

19 And now with the inquiry, it's like, maybe
20 there's more information that can help us search, and maybe
21 you guys can find more and tell us, and that way we'll
22 know, and it's just -- I don't know. It's such a
23 life -- it's going to be an ongoing process in life, and
24 the only way -- the only thing to do is to continue and

1 keep going until something comes of it and not give up.

2

3 With -- something else I have to say is my
4 mom was registered with Project KARE because one of the
5 people told her because she was female, she was around
6 downtown, that it was best for her to register, and when
7 they find, like -- like, if they find remains and stuff,
8 and sometimes they say it's Jane Doe or whatever, or they
9 don't -- can't find the next of kin or something, like,
10 would they be able to tell if something like that -- like,
11 right away instead of, like -- because I notice the police
12 don't really say anything. Like, how are we to find out
13 if -- you know, if they're not doing their DNA-testing,
14 where I've heard some cases that they didn't even test the
15 person, they just buried the person as Jane Doe or
16 John Doe, and -- you know, I think it's because they
17 couldn't find DNA for that person or something. I can't
18 remember reading about it, but my mom is -- my mom did give
19 her DNA, so if anything, they said that she had -- that if
20 she would go missing that they would have her DNA.

21 A lot of the -- and some other things about
22 Project KARE at that time, when -- my mom used to bring all
23 these little papers home with a license plate number, make
24 of a car, a male, you know, that had done something to a

1 female, and it had a lot to do with street workers, but
2 sometimes it wasn't because my mom was walking home one
3 time, it was middle of the day, she said she went to a
4 doctor's appointment, and she was walking home, and some
5 guy, like, was trying to push her into a car and say, oh,
6 let's go party or whatever, and she was like, what the
7 hell, and -- and she reported him to that Project KARE
8 because she didn't know who else to report it to because
9 she thought, you know, police won't listen to it, so she
10 reported it to the -- reported it to Project KARE, and they
11 printed it on that sheet that they give you about these men
12 that would, like, do stuff to women and -- just be reported
13 their car, make of car and license plate and what they did.
14 You know, I always wonder if the police are investigating
15 these men, especially when -- when I used to read some of
16 the -- what was said on them was, like -- for one of them I
17 had read was a woman that was -- she had went out on a
18 date, and the guy had raped her and left her outside the
19 city, and I was thinking, you know, like, with that
20 Project KARE, writing those before, why couldn't they see
21 if it was reoccurring? Like -- and -- like, why can't they
22 investigate those people? Like, you know, I always think
23 stuff -- like, I think far back, and -- to things like
24 that, and my kids always say, don't be a detective. I

1 said, yeah, but, you know, I just think about possible ways
2 we can find her, or if only they had done more
3 investigating, then -- if they had done more investigating,
4 then maybe a lot of these women wouldn't have gone missing
5 or -- I always think stuff like that, but I don't know.
6 Makes sense to me, but maybe not to others.

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Can I ask you
8 a couple of questions on that? You talked about the
9 Bissell Centre.

10 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

11 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Can you tell
12 me a little bit more about what that centre is?

13 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Bissell Centre is
14 like --

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Bissell.

16 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Hm? Yeah, a drop-in
17 centre where they have a lot of resources for homeless
18 people or people that are having -- going through hard
19 times.

20 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** And she was
21 picking up stuff from them regularly?

22 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** She was getting
23 her -- her mail and her cheque there because she had lived
24 down the block, like, maybe a half a block down from them,

1 and it was just more convenient for her because her mail
2 was getting stolen all the time from her place, so that's
3 why she started getting her mail there.

4 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Who runs that
5 centre? Is it through the City, or...

6 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** I have no idea.

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** M'hm. But
8 they knew -- they were the first ones to get in touch with
9 you when she wasn't picking up her mail anymore?

10 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

11 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Do you know if
12 they went and told the police?

13 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** They had filed a
14 missing persons report --

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** They did as
16 well.

17 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** -- because they say
18 that's mandatory for them to do if their clients aren't
19 coming to get mail and stuff, and...

20 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** And what
21 police force was it? I just -- is it just Edmonton Police
22 Services here in Edmonton --

23 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Yeah.

24 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** -- or is there

1 RCMP as well?

2 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** No. Just the EPS.

3 Yeah.

4 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Just Edmonton?

5 Okay. So in addition to your report that you filed, the
6 Bissell Centre filed a report as well?

7 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

8 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** But then in
9 2012, they said that there was no report filed?

10 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Yeah.

11 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Have you heard
12 from them at all since?

13 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** No.

14 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** No.

15 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** And even after I had
16 filed the first one, I remember them coming to my home a
17 few months after or a month after. They came to my door,
18 and they were -- they said they were doing a follow-up,
19 and --

20 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** In 2007 --

21 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Yeah.

22 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** -- when you
23 first filed it?

24 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** And they asked if I

1 knew of any boyfriend that she was dating at the time,
2 and -- like, they were writing it down and stuff, and they
3 left, and that was pretty much all because...

4 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Now, you spoke
5 to a lot of her friends.

6 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Did the police
8 speak to her friends? Did they ever say to you that the
9 police had come around asking about her as well?

10 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Only two of the people
11 said that they -- her friend Delores said that the police
12 came to her house, and they were looking for her, they
13 said.

14 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** M'hm.

15 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** And she said, well,
16 she's not here, and she said that's all I told them because
17 I didn't know where your mom was, and then her -- well, I
18 don't know if it was her boyfriend at the time because I
19 remember they had just broken up. His name was René (ph),
20 and him, too, he said the police had questioned him when he
21 went to jail. They'd asked him if he knew of my mom,
22 and...

23 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** M'hm. And is
24 Project KARE connected with the police? Like when,

1 they -- when she's reported missing, do you think they --

2 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** I have no idea.

3 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** No idea, eh?

4 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Because the lady that
5 was running it before, she had passed away three years ago,
6 the one that encouraged my mom to -- because I -- I
7 remember when my mom came and she said that she was
8 registered with Project KARE, and they said because too
9 many -- I think at that time, there were other women going
10 missing, and -- what was Agnes' middle -- last name?
11 Agnes?

12 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Bernard.

13 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Oh, Edna Bernard had
14 went missing, and I remember my mom, and -- was that then?
15 I don't know.

16 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Indiscernible).

17 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Yeah, she was, like,
18 friend of ours, and -- I mean, Edna Bernard, she was found
19 in a car that had been burned, and she was killed,
20 and -- but I remember --

21 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Indiscernible).

22 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Yeah. Project KARE,
23 they were, like, always -- they were concerned about the
24 women and stuff, so -- my mom used to go -- I can't

1 remember why my mom was (indiscernible), and they kept
2 telling her to get her DNA samples given, so she did, and
3 then when I went to Project KARE in, like, 2009, the lady
4 there, I can't remember if her name's Sandy or Sandra, but
5 she told me that it was a good thing for my mom to do that
6 because, you know, look at the situation we are in now, and
7 she said they encourage that for anyone and everyone, and I
8 said, yeah, it makes sense because -- I used to keep a lot
9 of my mom's clothes, her hairbrush, toothbrush, you know.
10 I tried to keep it because I thought about DNA stuff, and
11 just knowing that that Project KARE had my mom do that
12 and -- because I don't know how much about how DNA is done
13 or -- so...

14 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Is Project
15 KARE still ongoing still today?

16 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** I have no idea.

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Oh, okay.

18 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** I'M pretty sure it is
19 because -- I think last year I Googled it, and it was -- I
20 still seen a web page about it.

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Okay. So they
22 should still have her DNA? Don't know if that ever went to
23 the police?

24 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** No.

1 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** No? Okay. I
2 don't have a lot of more questions. I wanted to tell you a
3 little bit about the process of the inquiry because I know
4 that's some of your questions.

5 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** And we've been
7 given a certain amount of time to do this work, and we are
8 going to be asking for more time, but part of what we
9 wanted to do was to first hear from the families because so
10 many of the previous studies and reports and stuff have not
11 started with hearing your truth and using your truths as
12 the foundation for how we do our work. We're going to do
13 some expert panels -- like, some expert hearing from some
14 experts, and experts aren't just people that, you know,
15 went to universities and got a whole bunch of ABCs behind
16 their name. There's experts who have lived experience and,
17 you know, issues around human trafficking. Like, we need
18 to know more about what's happening, but we're also doing
19 institutional hearings. We are going to be hearing from
20 police, from Child and Family Services, from Coroner's
21 Office, these systems that are supposed to be in place to
22 serve and protect and to help us: What are they doing
23 about the issue of violence? What are they not doing? So
24 we'll be hearing from them.

1 We're also, because we have power under the
2 *Inquiries Act*, requesting documents files that, you know,
3 you can't get other way. We have that power to do that, so
4 we are requesting documents, and we're doing some audits of
5 police files to see if things were done right.

6 We're looking at patterns, and -- and
7 hearing, also, about recommendations and ideas from
8 families is so important, too, because, I mean, you were on
9 the ground. You were doing -- trying to do what you
10 believed police should have been doing, and because you
11 didn't have that authority, you know, you kept on running
12 into these blockades of privacy.

13 So we need to hear from you, what are
14 the -- and you've shared with those, and I want to thank
15 you and acknowledge for that that, you know, how can you,
16 when you come up against institutions with their rules
17 about privacy, you know, you're left in the dark, and if
18 another institution that has the power isn't going to do
19 that, where does that leave you?

20 You know, there's one thing -- I really want
21 to thank you both for what you've shared, and I want
22 to -- I want to acknowledge how hard it is not to have
23 answers and to be in that dark, and we'll do what we can.

24 Before we're done, I want to talk to that

1 idea that you talked about, you know, high risk, and I
2 think about when my son climbs up on a bookshelf. That's
3 high risk. Do I turn my back? No. The idea that we leave
4 by saying somebody is high risk and that was the reason,
5 that's all of us in society turning our back. When
6 something's high risk, that's when you go to them, and I
7 agree with you. Those words as excuses aren't acceptable.
8 Our reaction to those words is not acceptable.

9 So I just -- before we finished, I wanted to
10 say that, and I wanted to thank you for sharing. Was there
11 anything else you want to say before we're done, or your
12 aunty?

13 **MS. MURIEL WHITEMAN:** I think we should get
14 a finalized report from the gentle lady of each missing
15 person and what they found.

16 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** There will be
17 a final report. We're still developing what that's going
18 to contain and what it's going to look like, but I've heard
19 you loud and clear that you want to know that you were
20 hurt, and you want information, and you want a list of all
21 the recommendations that families have shared, including
22 yours, to be out there, to be accessible, so I've
23 written -- I've written that down, and I will share that
24 with my colleagues.

1 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** And I was going to ask
2 another question about -- if the police had, like, a -- a
3 search unit made specifically for missing people, like, to
4 be able to have something like that. Like, I'll give an
5 example of something I -- like, when I went through -- when
6 I buried my brother. We had to get moccasins for him. We
7 had to have a star quilt with him. We had to have a drum
8 group sing him in and sing him out. We had to have an
9 Elder there, and do you know, like, none of this was
10 available, so we had a meeting with the band, the Chief and
11 Council the next day after I had buried my brother and I
12 said, you know what, these things need to be at hand for us
13 as a community that when we're burying a loved one that we
14 have all these in place so we're not calling around. We
15 need to have that drum group available for that time, and
16 the Chief should have thought of these things before.

17 And that's something, like, with this
18 inquiry, like, when someone goes missing, you know, they
19 should have a search party ready at -- you know, ready to
20 go and look for this person or canvas or whatever. You
21 know, like, I think about stuff like that. Like, there was
22 a woman in a little town that went missing, and her dad
23 said, my daughter's missing, and she hasn't come back from
24 the store. Oh, well, how old is your daughter? Oh, she's

1 41. You know, it doesn't matter how old they are. They're
2 still your children, but the point is, like, he did a
3 search team -- as soon as, you know, she went missing, he
4 went looking for her, and I said, you know what, maybe if
5 we had something like that, maybe something would be -- you
6 know, maybe we could find them faster or -- I don't know,
7 something. Like -- like, they should have something with
8 the police, like, like -- you know, I used to watch movies,
9 and I'd see, you know, little kids went missing, and oh,
10 right now they have their dogs out there searching for
11 their scent and people searching everywhere, and -- like,
12 why can't we have something similar to that?

13 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Like standard
14 protocol --

15 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Yeah.

16 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** -- mechanisms,
17 response teams, yeah.

18 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm. And, like, kind
19 of like Search and Rescue, right?

20 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** M'hm.

21 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Like, there needs to be
22 something like that for people, and it's not just
23 for -- you know, it's not like we want, oh, our kid went
24 out with some friends, didn't call within 24 hours. They

1 don't need an amber alert right away because, you know,
2 like, that's something -- you know, amber alert is, you
3 know, for a more high -- higher -- like, more urgent
4 situation or whatever, and sometimes it's just we
5 need -- like, if I feel, like, if things were done quicker,
6 sooner, faster, you know, you went looking for them, you
7 know, it -- it's a tiring job, but sometimes you never
8 know, right? Sometimes you could get a break, and, you
9 know, you find that person right away. I don't know, it's
10 just -- people have to see it more positively, too, when
11 you're searching for somebody -- you never know. If you
12 had done it sooner than later, maybe you'd have had a
13 better outcome.

14 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I've heard
15 that from other families, too, that need for
16 responsiveness, quickness. You know, that answer, we'll
17 just wait a little bit, maybe -- you know, it's in that
18 little bit that so much got lost.

19 **MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

20 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** So thank you
21 for that recommendation.

22 Thank you, yeah, for coming and sharing. I
23 have some gifts for you. I -- I don't like explaining it
24 on the mic. I'd rather come talk to you, so I'm going to

1 let Joey do this explaining. Is that okay? You're going
2 to talk to the cameras and explain things while I talk to
3 Vanessa.

4 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Sure.

5 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** That's my
6 prerogative.

7 **Exhibits (code: P1P05P0301)**

8 **Exhibit 1:** Digital folder of six images displayed on
9 monitors during public hearing

10 --- Upon recessing at 11:43 a.m.

11 **Hearing # 2**

12 **Witness: Joanne Ahenakew**

13 **In Relation to Laura Ann Ahenakew and Bernadette Ahenakew**

14 **Heard by: Commissioner Qajaq Robinson**

15 **Commissioner Counsel: Christa Big Canoe**

16 **Grandmothers, Elders, Knowledge-keepers:**

17 **Florence Catcheway, Emily Mesher, Cynthia Cardinal,**

18 **Miyna Manniapik**

19 **Registrar: Bryan Zandberg**

20 **Commissioner of Oaths for the Province of Alberta:**

21 **Jeff Weigl**

22 **Note:** The witnesses smudge before the hearing; tobacco
23 exchanged with Commissioner Robinson

24 --- Upon resuming at 12:41 p.m.

1 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Good afternoon.
2 Commissioner Robinson, I would like to introduce you to our
3 next participant, Joanne Ahenakew. She will be sharing the
4 story of her Aunt Laura and her Aunt Bernadette. At this
5 point, I would actually ask that Joanne be affirmed in on
6 an eagle feather.

7 **JOANNE AHENAKEW, Affirmed**

8 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Commissioner
9 Robinson, Joanne comes to us today well prepared and would
10 like to start with a statement.

11 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Okay.

12 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Good afternoon. My
13 name is Joanne Ahenakew. I'm here to represent my family
14 to discuss our tragic losses and our experiences
15 throughout. I'm here to discuss the murders of my two
16 aunts, Laura Ann Ahenakew and Bernadette Ahenakew.

17 Lauren and Bernadette were precious to us.
18 Their absence from our lives is like a gaping hole. Their
19 untimely deaths and the violent way that they were taken
20 from us is something we may never recover from. They were
21 always part of our lives up until the day we lost them to
22 violence. Their lives mattered to us, and they always
23 will. When I think about them, I feel robbed.

24 My Aunt Laura came to visit us in Saskatoon
25 in 1985. She had been living in Calgary at the time. She

1 had just successfully completed another year in Bible
2 school there. She went missing not long after her arrival
3 in Saskatoon. My mother Nancy Masuskapoe promptly filed a
4 missing persons report.

5 Laura's body was found in a field on the
6 west side of Saskatoon in March of 1986. I remember being
7 told that a cross-country skier had come across her
8 remains. All that remained were her bones and
9 blood-stained clothing. Someone had stabbed her to death
10 and left her body there. We identified her through dental
11 records. She was 27 years ago old.

12 Excuse me.

13 I was just a kid at the time, but I remember
14 her bloody, knife-torn clothing being displayed on the
15 news. That image stayed with me since then. It
16 traumatized me. I never understood why this was done.
17 What purpose did it serve? None. This was only the
18 beginning of the media circus that began and brought more
19 suffering and pain to an already difficult situation.

20 Excuse me.

21 The investigation that handled Laura's
22 case -- the investigator, sorry, that handled Laura's case
23 were John Quinn and Dave Scott. My family liked both of
24 them a lot. They always treated us with respect and
25 compassion. They kept us updated on any progress they had

1 made in the case.

2 Laura's case did go to trial years later. I
3 remember it being the local news flash every day. The
4 trial was a very dark time for us. The media had a heyday
5 with this case, with horrible headlines like "hooker wars,"
6 sensationalizing a terrible act of violence. It was hard
7 to avoid, as it was on the radio, television, and
8 newspapers.

9 Cindy Karen (ph) was charged for the murder
10 that took -- the murder took place in September of 1985. I
11 remember seeing her on the news, taunting the media and
12 actually giving them the finger on one occasion. These
13 images will remain with me forever. It was the first and
14 only time that I saw the person accused of stabbing my aunt
15 to death.

16 As the trial -- as the trial went on, gory
17 details were the daily headline. There is even one whole
18 article written about how Laura had allegedly provoked her
19 stabbing by arguing with Karen. That Laura had accepted a
20 ride from the accused on the night in question made yet
21 another headline.

22 Excuse me.

23 My family went through daily pain listening
24 to the trial, watching the news, reading the paper, and
25 listening to the radio. They'd had enough, so they wrote

1 to the paper, and I'll read you what they wrote. The
2 headline given to their words were "Speculation Insensitive
3 to Family," and here is what they wrote:

4 "As family members of Laura Ann
5 Ahenakew, deceased, we want to
6 emphasize how traumatic it was and
7 still is to read the information
8 you printed: Three bodies, hooker
9 wars may be linked. Why is it
10 necessary to mention our late
11 sister's name when, in fact, you
12 are making assumptions and guesses
13 as to the possible connection?
14 You have indeed conjured up
15 memories in our hearts and minds
16 which are grim and grisly. In
17 fact, you have reopened deep
18 wounds within our hearts. It
19 seems you may have lost sight of
20 the fact that in many cases,
21 victims such as our sister have
22 left family members behind who are
23 still grieving and picking up the
24 pieces. How much longer do we
25 have to put up with this

1 insensitivity? Sensationalized
2 journalism such as this seems to
3 serve no purpose. Signed, Nancy
4 Masuskapoe and Morris Ahenakew.

5 Powerful words from her siblings on behalf
6 of the family who took up for her.

7 Cindy Karen was acquitted on a minor detail.
8 We suffered through the trial and the media circus, and for
9 what? My mother Nancy Masuskapoe and my Uncle Morris
10 Ahenakew again wrote a memorial in the same paper five
11 years after her death, and I'll read it to you now:

12 "Another year has come and gone
13 since you suddenly left us five
14 years ago. We miss you very much.
15 It broke our hearts to lose you in
16 such a tragic way. Our only
17 consolation is that we know
18 justice will be done sooner or
19 later. We stand upon our Lord's
20 promise in Psalm 37: 1,2 where he
21 says: 'Fret not thyself because
22 of evil-doers, neither be envious
23 against the workers of inequity,
24 for they shall soon be cut down
25 with the grass and wither as the

1 green herb.' We are assured that
2 you have gone on to that beautiful
3 city where the roses never fade.
4 You are gone to a city where the
5 streets of gold are laid, where
6 the tree of life is blooming and
7 roses never fade. You are gone to
8 live with Jesus where the roses
9 never fade. You are a precious
10 rose, dear sister."

11 Excuse me.

12 "We look forward to joining you in
13 that beautiful city where there
14 will be no more sorrow and
15 parting. We love and miss you.
16 Your sister and brother, Nancy and
17 Morris.

18 My Aunt Laura had a baby girl named
19 Melanie Dawn whom she had given up for adoption as a baby.
20 She kept Melanie as long as she could but decided that
21 she'd have a better chance with another family. I think
22 this changed my Aunt Laura. I don't think she ever stopped
23 missing Melanie, who was her only baby. I remember she
24 brought the photo album that she had dedicated to Melanie
25 with her when she came to visit us in Saskatoon. She was

1 so proud of her baby.

2 Melanie committed suicide six years ago.

3 She is worthy of mention.

4 Baby girl, we are so sorry we did not find
5 you in time. This, too, weighs heavily upon my family.

6 My other aunt on the missing and murdered
7 list is Bernadette Ahenakew. On October 24th, 1989, her
8 nude body was found in a ditch by two farmers just outside
9 Sherwood Park. It took sometime from the discovery of her
10 body to identifying it to be her. My mother had given
11 Bernadette the earrings she was wearing at the time of her
12 death, and one remained on her ear. When Bernadette's body
13 was found, this is one of the details that helped my mother
14 positively identify her.

15 Like my Aunt Laura, Bernadette has been
16 described as a known prostitute in the media. Again, the
17 media was applying labels to glamorize yet another violent
18 crime. This is a human being who was valued, loved, and
19 dearly missed.

20 I was praying I wouldn't cry.

21 We received notification through phone calls
22 and a formal letter from the RCMP who sent us a copy of the
23 article from the Edmonton Journal describing Bernadette's
24 body being found. We were informed that they were
25 investigating the crime and a cause of death was not

1 determined, but her body was described as beaten and frozen
2 in the paper. We were told she might have died from
3 strangulation, but this was never confirmed.

4 We received regular reports from the
5 investigating officer in the beginning on Bernadette's
6 case. However, this officer was transferred to another
7 unit, and another person took over, and that ended our
8 regular communication with him.

9 We have given up on having our day in court
10 for my Aunt Bernadette. This may never happen for us.
11 With the horrible experience we had with the media during
12 Laura's trial that ended up in an acquittal, maybe this was
13 a blessing.

14 I'm not sure our hearts are up for that kind
15 of pain again. Either way a person looks at this, it is
16 difficult to deal with. The lack of closure makes getting
17 over and past this very hard indeed. However, there are
18 families out there who are still wondering where and what
19 happened to their loved ones. At least we could bury
20 Bernadette.

21 One of the hardest things was never getting
22 to see Laura and Bernadette again. Laura had to be
23 cremated, and Bernadette had to have a closed-casket
24 funeral.

25 I remember paying attention to the Svekla

1 trial, and my aunt was listed as one of his possible
2 victims, but he, too, was somehow acquitted. This quashed
3 any hope we had of closure. It is a wound in our hearts
4 that remains open, but hope springs eternal.

5 Bernadette is survived by three sons. Like
6 Laura, her sons were also raised by others. Her first two
7 sons were raised by Bernadette's former foster parents, and
8 her youngest baby was raised by the birth father's mother,
9 so he's being raised by his grandmother. He's
10 in -- they're all in good places. All of these boys are
11 adults now and have children and families of their own.
12 They are pieces of the late Bernadette, and we love them
13 all very much.

14 Our interactions with the RCMP with regards
15 to these cases have always been respectful. The detectives
16 that handle Laura's case did their best, and for that, we
17 are eternally grateful. We pray for their safety, as they
18 are brave people to hunt down these monsters.

19 Like I said before, the first investigator
20 to handle Bernadette's case kept in frequent contact with
21 us. However, he was transferred, so the case was given to
22 another detective who was not so diligent in keeping
23 contact with us.

24 The RCMP now contact me on a regular basis
25 as to this case. They call to check in and are always

1 offering me and my family support. I know they are only
2 human, and this is an old case. Nevertheless, I will never
3 stop praying and waiting for justice, whether it's seen or
4 unseen by us family members. I don't think these monsters
5 get away with this because justice takes many forms.

6 Myself, my mother, Nancy Masuskapoe, and my
7 Uncle Morris Ahenakew have rallied for justice, respect,
8 and honour for Laura and Bernadette from Day 1. We have
9 marched, spoke with media, television, news, and we will
10 continue to be a presence. I came today to make darn sure
11 the media does not have another heyday with my aunties or
12 any other family. If someone in the media chooses to
13 slander or sensationalize these violent crimes, I will be
14 there to publicly call you out. I have spent my time on
15 this matter and dealing with media negativity, and it's not
16 going to break my stride.

17 I have cried, prayed, marched on
18 Parliament Hill to see this inquiry come to fruition, and
19 hallelujah, here we are.

20 No organization, group, or any political
21 group owns this issue. I have witnessed much
22 territoriality between groups over these missing and
23 murdered Indigenous people, and I find that ridiculous.
24 The people that own this are their surviving family members
25 who have fought from Day 1 to protect the memory of their

1 lost loved ones. The surviving family members are the ones
2 you should take your direction from. They can direct you
3 toward a better process, more positive interaction with law
4 enforcement, the court systems, et cetera. We have lived
5 through this, so we know firsthand what it really feels
6 like.

7 My recommendations are as follows. Do you
8 want me just to proceed? There needs to be zero tolerance
9 for racism to be put in place and actively monitored in the
10 RCMP training and policy and procedure. My family was
11 fortunate enough to have positive interactions most of the
12 time, but this is not the case for everyone. This issue of
13 mistrust is a serious matter, and it needs to be dealt with
14 on a daily basis until the negativity is eradicated. I
15 plan to make use of the support groups offered to me and my
16 family by the Project KARE unit here in Edmonton. They are
17 the only ones who have been consistent in offering help, so
18 they are the ones I trust. I live in a small community an
19 hour and a half away here from Edmonton, and I hate to use
20 the term "redneck," be they are the last people I'll go to.
21 I'll come to Edmonton for my help.

22 Number 2: Every life matters, and everyone
23 deserves a chance. We need to increase support to the
24 front-line organizations and their workers who deal with
25 people who are living high-risk lifestyles. I support

1 those groups that offer help freely with no strings
2 attached. God bless you all. The front-line organizations
3 I speak of are the halfway houses for women and men, soup
4 kitchens, groups that give clothing, access to health care,
5 et cetera. It goes on and on.

6 Number 3: Not everyone wants the street
7 life, and some are there and remain there because they have
8 no one and nowhere else to go. These people deserve a
9 chance and an opportunity to change their surroundings.
10 Access to housing, food and water, health care, safety,
11 education, and family supports for them and their children
12 are something that you should work on.

13 Examination of our foster care system is
14 another recommendation I have. Both of my aunts were in
15 foster care. In fact, all 13 kids in the family were
16 scattered and separated in the '60s scoop. Many of my
17 family members, including my aunts, suffered extreme
18 sexual, physical, mental abuse and neglect. This has a
19 ripple effect upon one's life. The ripples are
20 far-reaching and affect future generations.

21 Number 5: Reduction of poverty. Poverty
22 seems to be at the base of all high-risk lifestyles.
23 Reduction of poverty would have a positive impact for
24 everyone. The term "welfare trap" is real. This is what
25 keeps people living at or below the poverty level.

1 I came to speak to you today not for any
2 other reason than love for my aunts. I'm not here to put
3 them out on display or to make a name for myself. The
4 media has already done that, and they had no respect for
5 Laura or Bernadette.

6 I am here for justice, and I am here for
7 change. A lot of people have fought for this inquiry, so I
8 hope that this money given to this inquiry is put to good
9 use.

10 In the name of love, I love and miss you,
11 Aunty Laura and Aunty Bernie. You are ever loved and never
12 forgotten. The world was better with you in it.

13 I used to work with Sisters in Spirit when
14 it first began, and I compiled a portfolio here, and all
15 the statements I made about the negative media attention,
16 they're all documented here, so this -- I have fact and
17 articles to back up what I'm saying, so it's all here.
18 There's pictures here. I put pictures in the midst of all
19 the articles because these are people we're talking about;
20 beautiful, beautiful people.

21 When I worked with Sisters in Spirit, we
22 started researching the missing women in Edmonton, and I
23 just have to say their names because I kept a list of their
24 names, and there's so many more now, which is so sad, but I
25 just -- I have to say these ladies' names because I think

1 they've been my angels. Samantha Tayleen Berg; Lynn Minia
2 Jackson; Rachel Quinney; Cheryl Lynn Black; Katie Sylvia
3 Ballantyne; Melissa Munch; Debbie Lake, or also known as
4 Debbie Darlene; Monique Pitra (ph); Edna Bernard;
5 Vivian Rose Patty (ph); Kelly Dawn Riley (ph);
6 Jessica Cardinal; Joanne Ghostkeeper; Lorraine Ray (ph);
7 Cara King; Georgia Flint (ph); Gail Cardinal; Mavis Mason;
8 Bernadette Ahenakew; Deanna Marie Bellows (ph);
9 Rhonda Running Bird; Carrie Ottenbreit (ph).

10 I know there's many more of you ladies out
11 there. God bless you, ladies. You deserve better. All my
12 relations thank you.

13 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Can we just get the
14 pictures called up one at a time, please. Can you tell me
15 who's in this picture?

16 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** That's Bernadette
17 Ahenakew, and she's holding her youngest son, so...

18 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Can we get the other
19 picture, too, please.

20 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** And that's Laura Ann
21 Ahenakew and the late Melanie Dawn.

22 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And you were talking
23 about your portfolio.

24 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Yeah.

25 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And just -- may I

1 just hand it to the commissioner just to take a quick look?

2 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Sure.

3 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** We will have an
4 entire photocopy of this to be submitted, but I would like
5 to just let you see it for one minute.

6 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** You can look at it if
7 you want. The first articles are about Laura, so...

8 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** As the
9 commissioner's flipping through that, may I ask, you talked
10 about the fact that when you were working with Sisters in
11 Spirit that you started compiling this portfolio because
12 you wanted to capture a lot of the points that you shared
13 with us --

14 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Well, we
15 actually -- we received a grant, and we got a researcher to
16 start looking into names and whatnot, and we began to
17 compile a list. Now, there was a lot of other
18 research -- you know, there's lots of people -- this is
19 done before. This was done before, but for some reason, it
20 got media attention, and it wasn't always positive.

21 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** In this book,
22 though, it's -- the beginning's mostly about your family.

23 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Yeah. The beginning
24 of the portfolio is about -- like, it's all the news
25 clippings during the trial of Laura, and then it goes on

1 to -- whatever -- there wasn't too much in the -- in the
2 media about Bernadette. I think the biggest article was
3 when they located the body, and they had not yet identified
4 her, but a missing persons report had been filed, and so
5 the RCMP contacted my mother, and we positively -- she was
6 positively identified through the earring and then
7 through -- you know, she had to see her and positively
8 identify her, but the earring gave it away because my
9 mother had bought her those for Christmas.

10 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** May I ask you a
11 question?

12 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** It really bothered
13 me -- like, I know that she was found nude, but that
14 bothered me all the time, reading that again and again, and
15 any time they wrote about her, it was Bernadette Ahenakew,
16 comma, a known prostitute. What the heck was the purpose
17 of that? I guess to some it matters --

18 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** (Indiscernible)

19 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** -- but it's another
20 human being.

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah. But as
22 far as you know, that had nothing to do with any
23 investigation?

24 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** No.

25 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

1 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** No.

2 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So is it fair to say
3 that your own lived experience and going through and
4 experiencing everything around the two deaths of two loved
5 family members actually impacted your career path and some
6 of the advocacy that you've done in your life?

7 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** When I advocated for
8 my aunts, like I said, I just did it out of love. I -- I
9 wasn't seeking to carve out a career for myself on the
10 backs of my aunts. I'm not out to put them out for my own
11 gain, and I don't support anybody who does that, but I
12 spent a lot of time and energy doing that. I've stepped
13 away from it all because it got quite territorial, and
14 that's -- I -- I want no part of that. I just want
15 justice.

16 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And in terms
17 of -- you have your own children now, and you've spoke of
18 your aunt's children and their children. What are ways
19 that we -- we as an inquiry -- could actually commemorate
20 or memorialize the lives of these women so that the pride
21 and the necessary respect is given so that those children
22 get to hear those stories too?

23 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** The information that I
24 brought, this portfolio I made, you know, it's for -- to
25 share. We have nothing to hide. You know, I've said what

1 needed to be said. To us, they'll live on in our hearts
2 forever. They're never forgotten. There was a way we
3 could tell these stories and share them with other people.
4 We could share these stories with other families and let
5 them know that they're not the only ones because when
6 you're going through it, you feel all alone with your
7 sadness, especially with Laura. You know, we -- it's like
8 we couldn't go outside, being bombarded by media, couldn't
9 turn on the radio, couldn't watch TV, couldn't -- you know,
10 so -- I would like to see strong support systems put into
11 place for families that are going to trial, and it would be
12 nice to see somebody when the media starts attacking
13 families, because when you attack the victim, who is -- who
14 cannot speak and stick up for themselves from the grave,
15 it's the families that hurt. Somebody needs to speak to
16 this, and I know the media cannot be controlled. I know
17 that's hard. There's freedom of speech, but let's stop
18 supporting these people who sensationalize these crimes.
19 That would help everybody.

20 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** You've actually
21 provided us a lot of information, but I always want to make
22 sure that we haven't missed anything or that if there's
23 anything you wanted to add, that you have the opportunity
24 to do so, so if there is anything, please, please feel free
25 to share it with us.

1 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Yeah. I just want to
2 offer prayers, love, and support to all the families that
3 are here. My heart bleeds right along with you. This is
4 really hard. People say we're brave, but we're here
5 because of love, so I commend you all, everybody who came
6 here to speak. Now we go home, and we grieve again.

7 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Commissioner
8 Robinson, did you have any questions or comments for
9 Joanne?

10 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I want to
11 finish looking through this before we're done. When -- I
12 have a couple of questions. When you were going through
13 the court process for Laura's murder, did you get any
14 victim support? Were there -- was there anything in place
15 for you and your family during that time?

16 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** I was just a kid at
17 the time during the trial. I -- I remember my mother
18 shutting down. I remember her going to the trial every day
19 and coming home and crying herself to sleep every night.
20 Now, whether anybody offered her any help, I'm not sure,
21 but I don't think at the time, with everything that was
22 going on, I'm not sure that -- you know, that she was ready
23 to access it. I guess we -- we turned to our spirituality
24 for support and each other, and that's where it came from,
25 but, you know, my mother and -- you know, we've all since

1 gone -- you know, did some counseling and -- and talked
2 this stuff through, but it never -- when you lose somebody
3 the way we did, my aunts were disrespected so badly; how do
4 you get over that? You don't. It's hard, and it's been
5 years, and, you know, I thought, you know, I can get
6 through this talk without crying. Yeah, right. It -- it
7 never gets easy.

8 My mother has cancer right now. My
9 mother -- this broke my mother's heart, broke all our
10 hearts. It's like our heart broke, so we started mending,
11 and then someone else died, and we actually have another
12 aunt that was found in Vancouver under suspicious
13 circumstances. She could be a possible third. Who knows?
14 We've just lost too many.

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I don't have
16 any other questions. I want to take time to look through
17 this, and -- but I do want to -- I've heard from other
18 families the impact media had, you know, as a -- as a
19 positive tool, either they covered a disappearance well or
20 they don't, and the sensationalizing, the stereotyping.

21 I heard one recommendation about, like, a
22 code of ethics when it comes to reporting about Indigenous
23 women generally and Indigenous peoples. Do you have
24 thoughts on that? Like, is that something...

25 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Definitely. When I

1 worked with the Sisters in Spirit campaign, I was the
2 vice president of the Native Women's Association here in
3 Edmonton. I was very politically active with the Sisters
4 in Spirit, and if you go through that portfolio --

5 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I see.

6 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** -- there's actually an
7 editorial written -- I won't name him. I can't stand him.
8 He -- he wrote an article basically, like, cutting the
9 research that we presented down, and -- you know,
10 base -- it's just an insulting article, and, you know, for
11 days, I wrote many responses. Then I thought to myself, is
12 it worth it? Is -- will I be just, you know, playing into
13 what this person wants? Will it be sensationalized more?
14 Right? Will I be dragged through the mud again for
15 speaking my truth?

16 And I spoke of the territoriality between
17 groups, like I said -- you know, and it should be
18 emphasized -- this is an issue that's owned by the
19 families, not any organization. I even had a woman write
20 an editorial agreeing with this man. I'm not sure the
21 purpose of that. Then again, I sat down, I wanted to write
22 a response to the media to that, but you know what? I
23 never engaged. These people were never worth that to me,
24 and you're -- you know, there should be, but will they
25 follow that? You know, how do we -- how do -- how does

1 that get monitored? I think that's fantastic idea, but how
2 would we effectively put that into place, right? There's
3 so many forms of media now. Now there's the internet,
4 and -- you know. There's so many -- I looked up my aunts'
5 names on the internet one time, and there were some
6 anonymous writer writing details -- like, basically a story
7 up to how Bernadette died, and I wrote this person back,
8 saying, how on earth could you possibly know this? Person
9 never responded, so -- I don't know how we would control
10 that, but I am in full support of something like that.

11 I always wondered, you know, did
12 Melanie Dawn, who never met her mother, knew her name, did
13 she find these articles? Like, we never got to explain how
14 beautiful Laura was. Never got the chance. I always
15 wondered how this might have negatively impacted the
16 daughter she never met, reading these kind of things that
17 were untrue. They're very damaging. Like, it's very
18 damaging.

19 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I think you
20 hit the nail on the head when you said they lose sight.

21 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Sure do.

22 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah. I want
23 to thank you. Those are my questions. I want to -- I want
24 to stop talking, and I want to look -- continue going
25 through the book. I don't know if you want to keep -- if

1 you want to adjourn, and I can sit in those chairs and do
2 it. I'm fine with that.

3 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Yes, please. If we
4 could take 10 minutes, 15? What would you prefer?

5 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Give everybody a
6 chance to look?

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

8 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Yeah.

9 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Yeah.

10 **MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Yeah, there's a lot
11 there.

12 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** So 15?

13 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** When's your next --

14 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Fifteen works.

15 Thank you.

16 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So yes, if we could
17 adjourn for 15 minutes and recommence at that time.

18 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I'm going
19 to -- and you're going to explain.

20 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay.

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Pulling rank.
22 I'm giving the gifts, and you explain it.

23 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. Certainly.
24 So what the commissioner is actually about to give you is a
25 gift, and it's a gift of gratitude because you've shared

1 your story. We really -- what the Commission is doing
2 is -- wrapped in the red is an eagle feather, and so the
3 matriarchs in Haida Gwaii had made an instruction that
4 anyone sharing their truth should be given an eagle
5 feather, and then a national call-out was made so that
6 people would provide eagle feathers, and it's just really
7 to honour you for sharing your story.

8 And the other thing is seeds. There's a
9 package of seeds, and the seeds, we hope that, you know,
10 out of the growth of new life with the plant that -- it
11 represents new growth, and we hope that if you do plant and
12 grow them, that you'll take pictures and send them back to
13 us.

14 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** You're welcome.

15 Thank you for coming.

16 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** You know what, you
17 think you come in just for healing, but actually, you're
18 coming here to give us -- you give us a gift of healing. I
19 want to thank you for that. *Hay-hay.*

20 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** You're welcome.

21 Thank you for coming. Thank you for coming.

22 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Please step down and
23 have a break.

24 **(SHORT PAUSE)**

25 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Good afternoon. I

1 just wanted to formally announce that all of the hearings
2 in this space for today are now closed. There will be a
3 closing ceremony that will occur here at 5 p.m., so the
4 room will be open again this afternoon at 5. This hearing
5 is actually complete now, and so -- there is still another
6 public hearing, actually, ongoing in Public 2, and as I
7 said, you're welcome, all, please, to come back for the
8 closing ceremony.

9 **Exhibits (code: P1P05P0302)**

10 **Exhibit 1:** Digital folder of images displayed on
11 monitors during public hearing

12 **Exhibit 2:** Scan of photo album presented to
13 Commissioner Robinson during the public
14 hearing; 104 pages

15 --- Upon adjourning at 1:30 p.m.

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Jenessa Leriger, 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.



Jenessa Leriger

February 16, 2018