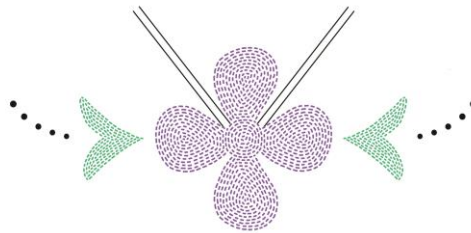


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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
Siniktarvik Hotel & Conference Centre Salon A/B
Rankin Inlet, Nunavut**



PUBLIC

Tuesday February 20, 2018

**Public Volume 46(a)
Laura Mackenzie,
In relation to her aunt Betsy Kalaserk;**

**Nikki Komaksiutiksak,
In relation to her cousin Jessica Michaels;**

**Heard by Commissioners Qajaq Robinson
& Michèle Audette**

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II

APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations	Julie McGregor (Legal counsel)
Government of Nunavut	Alexandre Blondin (Legal counsel)
Government of Canada	Anne McConville (Legal counsel)
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Note: For the purpose of establishing this record of attendance, counsel are considered present whether they attended one or all of the hearings held over the course of the day.

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1 Rankin Inlet, Nunavut

2 --- Upon commencing on Tuesday, February 20, 2018

3 at 1:53 p.m.

4 **Hearing #1**

5 **Witness: Laura Mackenzie**

6 **In relation to her aunt Betsy Kalaserk**

7 **Heard by Commissioner Qajaq Robinson**

8 **Commission Counsel: Lillian Lundrigan**

9

10 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: (Speaking in
11 Inuktitut).

12 THE INTERPRETER: Commissioner Qajaq is
13 here with us. Thank you. Thank you, Laura, for being here
14 for your testimonial this morning. We look forward to
15 hearing your testimonial --

16 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: (Speaking in
17 Inuktitut).

18 THE INTERPRETER: I will speak in English
19 although I can speak Inuktitut but we are so influenced by
20 the use of the English language that we have programmers
21 that come from the south to work and a lot of times they
22 don't provide us with their names, and I do apologize that
23 I will be speaking in English. I apologize to the
24 audience, but as I speak, this will be aired across Canada,
25 so I want to make my statement very clear about what it is

1 I wish to speak of, of the wait and the burden I have
2 carried with me for so long. So I will speak in that
3 manner and I will speak from my heart honestly to you.

4 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: My name is Laura
5 Mackenzie. I am a survivor of a murdered and missing
6 Indigenous woman whose name was Betsy Kalaserk. She was 29
7 years old, and was raised in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut. But
8 she was my aunt. There's a picture of her. Beautiful.
9 The way I always see her. I grew up with her in Nunavut.
10 You know, extended family is family regardless.

11 I considered her my sister because she was
12 just a year younger than me and this is what I would like
13 to say about her life that she was a child sexual abuse
14 victim. That is correct. I must state that. I'm talking
15 about it or will talk about it; how we can prevent children
16 from going through what she went through. And that's why
17 I'm here today.

18 It affected her relationships and the
19 sexual abuse made her take her own life. It was a lifelong
20 suicide and the work she did to harm herself because of the
21 sexual abuse. She could not recover from this. And the
22 very people that should have protected her from this were
23 the very ones that abused her.

24 This was in the end that made her
25 identity. It's important for the inquiry to understand the

1 situation that led to the death of my aunt at the tender
2 age of 29.

3 She started off with the life of any
4 normal child if you look from the outside, but that was not
5 the case for this unfortunate child. The child came from
6 the home where the traditional lifestyle had changed from
7 the nomadic way of life to the community way of life. The
8 nomadic way was harsh as you heard from the elders. It was
9 a live or die society. It was cold and it was harsh. Many
10 forms of abuse happened in the home. These forms of abuse
11 were too common in the little communities, and this led to
12 a dysfunctional lifestyle of alcohol, drug abuse, and self-
13 harm.

14 Both of Betsy's parents had parents that
15 died at an early time of their life where the foundation
16 building of a child would exist between parents, so other
17 adults came into the picture to help raise the parents,
18 which in turn did not have the best outcome of the adults
19 in the long run.

20 There was many forms of abuse that had
21 already started. This, in turn, brought many dysfunctional
22 dysfunctions into the young couple's home, who eventually
23 married and had over 13 children. Many abuses were carried
24 out. No one dealt with the issues till later, by the
25 parents, by one of the parents, that was some of the

1 children who wish to do so.

2 When the communities came and the style to
3 offer a wage and a free shack to live in was offered. I'm
4 sure you hear of all these elders saying they were, "Come
5 into the community, live in a shack." At least it's better
6 than an igloo. Many opportunities came and the colonial
7 lifestyle provided an advanced and easier way of living
8 where the family could support themselves with the wage
9 economy.

10 All this type of living included the
11 drugs, alcohol, and lots of sexual promiscuity that was
12 rampant with the little Hudson Bay Liquor Store. This was
13 the many problems that added to the dysfunction of a family
14 home. Betsy Kalaserk had much strength. And then once I
15 do recall was her ability to be able to make friends so
16 easily and the ability to see the bigger picture of not
17 looking at the faults of others, she reminded me regularly.
18 "Leave them alone. That's not your problem."

19 She was able to look past the bad in
20 others and was always able to see the good in people. She
21 made so many loyal and fierce friends that would defend her
22 anytime and anywhere. Her talent was the ability to leave
23 an imprint in your life.

24 She looked after my two older children and
25 was always interacting and looking but very cautious as to

1 anyone that would come in their harm's way. My daughter
2 sitting there, she looked after her. She loved my second
3 oldest child, Aangauk (ph), and she loved her I think more
4 than her own. They had a special bond that no one could
5 break, and I know this could never be replaced nor would I
6 ask.

7 Her dreams, you ask. Thank you for asking
8 about good things about these people. They must be
9 remembered about the good things. She had many. She
10 wanted to have a happy life, and she would have a home
11 where she could have a happy, healthy life with her
12 children and her husband. She believed in God, and
13 believed that anything that was done behind doors was
14 always forgivable, and that people, no matter how bad
15 things had been done to them, that we could go on and live
16 the best happiest life with God as the centre of our life.
17 She told me that, you know, a week before she passed away.

18 Her struggles though were real. She would
19 stop drinking and then start drinking, and that would be a
20 thorn in her life. And she didn't drink. She had a good
21 steady group of friends and family that would help her any
22 time and any day. I think her struggle was -- she wasn't
23 able to cope. She did have counselling when she lived in
24 Yellowknife, but the thing here that you must be aware, I
25 don't know if the counselling was consistent if the support

1 was consistent for her, that she needed it for her mental
2 well-being. But she could not overcome the sexual abuse
3 that she had encountered for many years and no one seemed
4 to want to help.

5 The family and community have always may
6 be in shame would not report or speak about the abuse. The
7 only time the abuse was mentioned was when another victim
8 was abused, but for some reason, it would not be spoken or
9 reported. The challenges she faced was her illiteracy, but
10 she worked hard at learning to read and write as soon as
11 she got into school.

12 She started school maybe 8 or 9. But when
13 she did go, she excelled and was about to catch up in her
14 grade level in just a couple years. You see those warning
15 signs, people? Not sending a child to school? Let's not
16 leave that kind of stuff. Let's quit turning a blind eye
17 to this when we know. I'm sorry, I don't mean to be mad.
18 I want to be a voice for her and children.

19 Even though she had Inuktitut as her first
20 language, she was so smart and intelligent. She was able
21 to catch up fast as ever. I was actually even envious when
22 she started showing off. I said I don't want to see it.
23 "Why?" I'm like I didn't want to say it. You know,
24 sibling rivalry. You want to say because you're doing
25 better. You don't want to admit to your sibling you're

1 smarter or they're smarter.

2 Her challenges -- you must hear this --
3 were that she could not develop deep, personal
4 relationships with a male. The male relationship had been
5 tarnished at a young age. She could not or did not know
6 how to have a healthy relationship with a male. She tried
7 her best to have a relationship, but there was always a
8 parent interfering into the relationship. You see those
9 signs again, everybody? It seemed like she was not allowed
10 to have her husband.

11 The only time that she was allowed to have
12 a relationship was when she moved away and started having a
13 real relationship. It didn't last long. Her self-esteem
14 had been diminished at a young age and did not see herself
15 worthy because of the shame of child sexual abuse. Her
16 life skills were a challenge. I could see it when she
17 wrote letters to me, gave me a call.

18 Her boundaries at a young age were not
19 developed appropriately, and this was due to the fact that
20 it may have been generational factors with no proper
21 parents to guide the parents growing up. Betsy knew what
22 was wrong and what was right. As soon as she was able to
23 enter in this community and school, she functioned as well
24 as anyone could in a small community but limited service,
25 trust factors, confidentiality, small communities, women

1 agencies. The trust factor with government agencies was
2 questionable at times. This was 20 years ago.

3 Many social programs in the past have a
4 history of colonialism or paternal that go against the
5 traditional ways of social programming where in the Inuit
6 ways, an Elder advisor, who has no criminal convictions --
7 sorry, I'm getting old. I can't see anymore. Yeah, sorry.
8 I'm starting to get -- yeah, sorry, I got to use this --
9 this colonial paternal systems goes against the traditional
10 ways of social programming where in the Inuit ways, an
11 Elder advisor, who had no criminal convictions, would help,
12 you know, of hurting or abusing was usually the leader of a
13 small circle with advice as to how to handle any conflicts
14 that arise in a household. That was taken. The
15 communities' ways are now where people are reported,
16 written down, and then go back to their home and discuss
17 another action or plan. I call it the "reaction plan".
18 It's a reaction. It's not a solution. We react.

19 This doesn't work for the family and will
20 never work. Sexual abuse is not talked about. Many
21 victims blame themselves or have a love-hate relationship
22 with the abuser. Many victims think if you don't talk
23 about it, you won't be thought of as garbage or if people
24 are aware of you being a victim, then you become a target
25 for other predators that are around in the community. They

1 know the vulnerable ones. They become targets. Maybe
2 society likes to judge victims, but being quiet about it
3 makes it worse.

4 Many victims such as Betsy end up killing
5 themselves slowly because child sexual abuse is a silent
6 killer. Her resilience was phenomenal. She had to deal
7 with a lot of trust issues and decided to remove herself
8 from the community of Rankin Inlet to produce a better
9 life. I'm sure you guys heard that travelling all across
10 Canada. They left for a better life in the city of
11 Yellowknife.

12 She moved to Yellowknife in her mid-
13 twenties, and I did see a positive change in her
14 circumstance. I can tell you that. There were support
15 systems in place there. She met a young First Nations man,
16 who himself moved away from a small community east of
17 Yellowknife, and they both were sober and young and full of
18 life and wanted to have a family to build a better future
19 for a little while. I want Jasa to know she tried her best
20 to be the mother she could. I know he's here. She tried
21 her best.

22 Both couples were sober and probably
23 attending meetings for sobriety, which I think she
24 mentioned to me in a letter, but she was going to the AA
25 program with her husband. They ended up having a son, who

1 is now a young man, and his name is Jasa Kalaserk.

2 As you sit here, Jasa, I want you to know
3 they love you dearly, and you are always the centre of
4 their attention. You could tell in the pictures that I
5 have still put away.

6 The fairy tale didn't last long. The
7 abuse as a child started to seep into their relationship.
8 People who have been abused think they're not allowed to
9 have a good life. They constantly blame themselves and
10 continue to self-harm by abusing themselves either through
11 drugs, self-harm cutting, and even alcohol or possibly
12 infidelity. You hear those things again? Self-harm, those
13 are triggers. Listen.

14 A favourite memory I may have of her are
15 many. I can't specifically say that I have one that really
16 speaks to me, but I can share the memories that I do recall
17 fondly. My memory of her is when she looked after my
18 children. We were close. When I moved to Arviat for a
19 while and was trying to finish my school, she came over and
20 decided she wanted to look after my child.

21 She decided that she would move away from
22 where she had lived and decided to sacrifice her life as a
23 young teen and help me with my child. It was wonderful to
24 have a family member from my side who provided me the
25 support I need to raise my child. She was a wonderful

1 person. Always gave more love than I could possibly
2 imagine. Another human can give to another person's child.
3 This is my fond memory of her. Always cared for children.
4 Always protected the children.

5 This is the hard part. And it took a
6 while, and I thank the inquiry for challenging me on this
7 question. It was a lot of reflection. How can the inquiry
8 honour my loved one, Betsy Kalaserk? There are many ways
9 you can honour a young woman's life in future generations
10 of Inuit that will go ahead of her. As a young Indigenous
11 Inuk woman, there are many ways that the inquiry can help.
12 There are different ways and different levels that women,
13 especially women in small, remote northern communities, can
14 get support. Can and should.

15 The child sexual abuse that is rampant
16 must be dealt with. There are way too many people killing
17 themselves because of child sexual abuse or other forms of
18 abuse. There are way too many family members in the
19 communities that stay silent when a sexual predator is
20 abusing their child or other children. The church seems to
21 encourage the abuser by saying pray and forgive and not
22 report the abuser, especially if it's a relative or a high
23 standing official or a family member.

24 These aren't easy for me to say or if it's
25 a big family and the person's abusing, the smaller family

1 members will get bullied into staying silent. I believe in
2 God, but I don't believe God would want any child to be
3 sexually abused continuously by a person. That's not the
4 God I know. I think any person in a position of trust
5 should report child sexual abuse or any abuse. I believe
6 if a parent is sexually abusing a child, this should be
7 reported and dealt with and the person that reports should
8 be supported by the family members and the community.

9 We need child sexual abuse specialists in
10 the territory, who can work with the many people in the
11 communities, and it can't be one person per region. That
12 person is a human being. One person can only do so much.
13 This would not be one person but would be many who can work
14 on prevention and possibly a doctor who can work to ensure
15 that any trauma in a young child or person while their mind
16 is flexible, moldable, can be molded into a healthy
17 individual.

18 We need these positions now. Let's work
19 while they're little. I do agree, yes, adults need
20 counselling from trauma in the past, but I think the TRC
21 has been working on that, but let's start helping the
22 little ones.

23 Elders should be speaking out against
24 sexual abuse and any form of abuse to anyone. Their role
25 is to honour and protect a family member and to bring

1 healing, so there is no more sexual abuse. Elders and the
2 families and communities need to stop lateral violence.
3 This starts from family to family, in this instance, to the
4 children. I always hear that thing growing up Inuktitut.
5 (Speaking in Inuktitut).

6 THE INTERPRETER: You shouldn't be
7 listening to the elders' conversation. Maybe we have to
8 look at this way instead.

9 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Listen, let's not do
10 lateral violence to other family members in the community.
11 That strong, old injustices from old family brawls seemed
12 to be forwarded onto new generations. This must stop and
13 leaders and head of households need to speak up and stop
14 this picking on others to feel better about themselves.

15 The quality of life is always spoken like
16 it's some kind of euphoria that only the elite of educated
17 people, Inuit, non-Inuit can obtain when they remove
18 themselves from their remote communities. The quality of
19 life is different for the southern cities. Many can run
20 away by taking a bus, hitching a ride, or drive to another
21 place for a better, you know, jobs or services.

22 Women such as Betsy never was given the
23 opportunity to have a better life. Those opportunities
24 came to those who may have had family in higher levels of
25 government or who hold high levels of office or maybe

1 people who have good paying jobs. You have no chance of
2 escaping. If you don't have the means or family relations
3 to climb the success ladder. Very few are fortunate to
4 climb but do with a lot of barriers, you know, such as the
5 glass ceiling. I'm sure you guys all understand that. Or
6 bullying, you know.

7 A quality of life is achieved when
8 children can grow up with no form of sexual or physical
9 abuse. Prevention and teaching this would improve the
10 lives of the community members. We need to elect people
11 who are role models and have not been charged or is known
12 to have done any sexual or physical abuse. We got to quit
13 electing if we know they beat their wife or she beats her
14 husband.

15 I know these aren't easy things for you
16 guys to hear, but I want you to know it's not easy for me
17 to say. We can no longer turn a blind eye to a politician
18 that has beaten their spouse. This is degrading to the
19 family unit. We must encourage and elect people to run who
20 are against any abuse of any form and speak against it.

21 In order for women who were once, you
22 know, children, need the following basic services that our
23 southern counterparts have right from the get-go, a family
24 doctor who is aware of the family histories such as health,
25 mental and emotional well-being, the family doctor is a

1 long-term family member that ensures that the family unit
2 is healthy till pretty much the end of their life.

3 We in the remote communities don't have
4 this consistently. Some don't even have it. I just
5 thought of it. We're lucky in Rankin and Iqaluit. This is
6 detriment to our society especially with the colonial
7 trauma caused by residential school, child sexual abuse.
8 We are fortunate to have a visiting doctor come to Rankin
9 to speak with everyone that can have the courage to go and
10 seek the doctor. I think he's located here, the doctor
11 that is paid by the federal government, I think that
12 independent, you know, TRC thing, but there's a little sign
13 and they advertised it on Facebook and stuff like that, but
14 who qualifies? Like, what's the definition if you're, you
15 know, not truly bilingual, you know.

16 Child sexual abuse specialist is critical
17 and is needed in the communities. Persons who can work to
18 ensure that children who have been abused will not be, like
19 Betsy, and set a life sentence of making sure they're not
20 set to kill themselves.

21 We need to ensure that communities
22 reconnect with the whole idea of wellness. If you go into
23 a small community, there is a spirit of community where
24 never everyone works to ensure that any family that is
25 affected by the loss of a family member, loss of a home,

1 that everyone pitches in to help. We have that. That
2 spirit resonates into our community, but we need more.
3 Again, we must prevent lateral violence especially with the
4 haves and have-nots of the community wellness in a whole
5 terminology we can use differently.

6 We need to work on ensuring our children
7 are safe at home, first of all. We need to raise children
8 and families that understand that any form of abuse is
9 strong and take action to see that there are steps in place
10 to assist the child into growing up into a healthy adult.
11 We need wellness plans for families and communities,
12 concrete life skills for the parent and child. We really
13 need these children to be seen consistently, you know,
14 doctors that specialize with children, you know,
15 pediatricians and stuff like that. It's always on a issue
16 basis or something that, you know, doesn't work.

17 So I'll speak about something very sad.
18 I'm saddened to date that our community of Rankin Inlet has
19 yet to find out who has killed an 11-year-old boy in Rankin
20 Inlet. Why is this community staying silent about this
21 horrendous act that has happened to this child, and yet
22 there are people in this town who know who have murdered
23 this innocent kid.

24 Yes, an 11-year-old cousin of mine was
25 murdered this summer and no one is telling, willing to tell

1 what has happened. He's my son's age. And the literal
2 violence that I hear on social media on him being wrapped
3 in a tarp, that's lateral violence again. How could people
4 just tap on the little thing and have no feelings? It
5 hurts my cousin. I'm extremely saddened when I see the
6 father walking each day with his head down, and I know it
7 pains him every day that his child is not here. Where is
8 the empathy? Eleven years old. Somebody is protecting a
9 murderer. Where's the pain? Where's the empathy? We have
10 to find the courage to tell the truth. Who has murdered
11 that child? Report it. His parents are suffering every
12 day. I see them. My cousin every day walking with his
13 head down. It affects me. I know people think I'm strong,
14 but I feel for him. Eleven-year-old little boy. What a
15 way to die.

16 Long-term solutions are required. They
17 require capacity, resources at the communities, and
18 Nunavut. I think Rebecca Williams was here. She used to
19 be the Deputy Minister of Family Services. She
20 understands. (Speaking in Inuktitut).

21 THE INTERPRETER: I know Rebecca Williams
22 went through a very hard time as she dealt with this issue
23 trying to deal with these heavy burdens.

24 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: -- that was ensuring
25 that we have front line workers who can help the survivors

1 grow resilient and ensure that they can take up the cause
2 and become leaders in their communities. Lateral violence
3 must end. The continue putting down of each other will not
4 stop until we have individuals heal from the unaccountable
5 actions made against the victims.

6 I'll start talking about the court now.
7 (Speaking in Inuktitut).

8 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: (Speaking in
9 Inuktitut).

10 THE INTERPRETER: What you believe is a
11 reliable.

12 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: (Speaking in
13 Inuktitut).

14 THE INTERPRETER:

15 The court case was carried out in this
16 city of Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories. Just to
17 give some background.

18 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Jasa, is your
19 girlfriend here? Susan is Jasa's girlfriend. I want her
20 to listen. She's never heard the story. I want you to
21 listen to his story.

22 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: Do you want me to
23 give you a few minutes to read it?

24 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yes.

25 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: I've given copies

1 to Commissioner Qajaq the Reasons for Judgment and
2 sentencing in the court case of Ian in the matter of Betsy
3 Kalaserk in the NWT court in Yellowknife.

4 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: I won't speak that
5 in detail, Qajaq, but I will give you a general thing.
6 Working as government, you always have to read documents
7 and then brief somebody in two sentences, so I'll give you
8 that, okay, for free.

9 When my aunt died, her husband was charged
10 with second-degree murder. He got four years, but got off
11 two years for good behaviour. I was researching and found
12 that if you're charged with second-degree murder in
13 jurisdictions such as Ontario -- and this is Google, so I
14 don't know if Google's that good, okay, so I may be wrong -
15 - but I think the Ontario justice system, looking at their
16 information, was probably valid.

17 Domestic homicide of an unarmed partner
18 has a range of 12 to 17 years particularly aggravating
19 feature for a penalty of a greater-than cases. So, do you
20 see the leniency with the Aboriginal being less than an
21 average penalty in another province? 12 to 17 years.
22 (Speaking in Inuktitut).

23 THE INTERPRETER: In the justice system
24 accordingly, he should have been convicted of a penalty of
25 12 to 17 years, but that was not the case. He was

1 convicted for two years. That is not fair. This was a
2 human being.

3 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: If you go to the
4 Canadian law animal offence cruelty, if you endanger an
5 animal, you can be charged under the Canadian law.
6 Punishment can be five years. If you look at the story,
7 where my Indigenous Inuk Aunt Betsy Kalaserk's spouse was
8 given two years for this paints our criminal law that
9 speaks that our animal's laws are above Indigenous women.
10 Their life is more. Is that what our lawmakers, policy
11 makers, want to convey to the world, that Indigenous lives
12 don't matter? Or will we really look into the systemic
13 issues facing Indigenous women, Inuit, that their lives
14 matter as much as any other women in Canada and the world.

15 Again, I say her life didn't matter to the
16 judge and the jury, but her life did matter to the family,
17 today, that sits and grieves for her. She mattered to me,
18 that I stand here today, on radio to say that she could
19 have lived and had a life. If only she was not abused and
20 that the system and community failed and turned a blind eye
21 to the things that happened to her. It was only when she
22 left the community that help was given, but there could
23 have been help at the very young age when her life could
24 have turned around for the better. Those are the things
25 that don't make me sleep at night. Those are the things I

1 get up three in the morning. What if, what if, what if.

2 We need to review our judicial system to
3 ensure that when an Indigenous person is killed or murdered
4 that the jury be Indigenous. That there be no bias to the
5 jury. We can't completely delete biases. I know that.
6 But we can ensure if an Indigenous woman is murdered, that
7 the jury is Indigenous. And I'm a woman, I'm going to ask
8 more than I'm allowed, a full representation of women on
9 the jury.

10 I also want people to know the inquiry to
11 advertise to the average Canadian that is watching on TV.
12 As an Inuk, we pay the highest taxes in Canada. And as a
13 taxpayer, I should have the basic health and education
14 services that everyone in southern Canada has. I think I
15 was fighting with my husband about how many per cent taxes
16 we pay. It's quite a lot. We must be given equal
17 opportunity to have the same health workers that every
18 Canadian has in southern Canada. It's our equal right. I
19 pay more taxes than most people down south.

20 Last but not least, Qajaq, I would
21 recommend that after the inquiry is completed, that similar
22 to the -- I'll give you this, so you don't have to write it
23 all -- Truth and Reconciliation, a report is made, but I
24 must stress that independent body be created from this
25 inquiry to ensure that the framework, recommendations are

1 brought forward. Policies be created at every level of
2 government, but they be actioned in a timely plan. This
3 will instill true reconciliation to the women who are the
4 creators of life.

5 If we want healthy communities, we must
6 ensure our women are strong and able to be supported, so
7 communities can thrive and grow into the quality of life
8 everyone is speaking of.

9 As a survivor, I want people to know that
10 they should never be ashamed of what has happened to them.
11 I want people to know that speaking to a professional about
12 this is very vital to the well-being of your mind. There's
13 no shame. And if I can leave that with you as a message, I
14 want people to know that. I want to thank the inquiry for
15 coming to my beautiful cold town. And I was even going to
16 freeze my legs, but I needed to wear red. I always have to
17 make a statement. And I anticipate and wait to see the
18 recommendations will come into force. I believe it. I
19 believe they will. You have my support.

20 I want to thank my husband, Richard, who's
21 been my rock. He's been really helping me to be honest
22 with myself. And I want to thank Lynn, my support who's
23 made me grow and challenge myself to who I need to be. I
24 really appreciate it. I want to thank Crystal, Jasa, who
25 had to find the courage within themselves to revisit the

1 whole ordeal and for supporting me. I really hope it
2 brings closure to you guys. I really hope. I want to
3 thank Mary Fredlund, who cannot be here. She's one of the
4 counsellors who has been very honest with me to find my
5 truth. Sandra Nichol, my friend who's always fighting for
6 women, especially women's Indigenous rights. Therese
7 Tungilik, I think she's here. I want to thank her, too,
8 from the Status of Women Council. Rebecca Kudloo from
9 Qullit. She has been my strong mind when I'm weak. She
10 has been the go-to person that when I wanted to give up,
11 she lifted me up mentally. Thank you. (Speaking in
12 Inuktitut).

13 THE INTERPRETER: I'd like to thank the
14 elders whose names I will not state at this time. I love
15 you. I thank you for your strong minds that we can speak
16 today. And I was told one time that the elders carry a
17 strength that I can reach out to in times of weakness and
18 sure enough, it has been true for me. Thank you.

19 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: -- if I have
20 forgotten to mention your name for being an ear. I needed
21 someone to hear this difficult story. I have sudden
22 confidence and have finally written it. I'm thankful to
23 you if I haven't mentioned your name. There are many, I
24 hope after hearing my story, will be able to tell their
25 story and find a reason to move from this inquiry to a

1 whole new level of healing. Thank you.

2 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: (Speaking in
3 Inuktitut).

4 THE INTERPRETER: Thank you Laura. Your
5 comments are strong. Good. We take them as Inuit.

6 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: -- powerful,
7 empowering. (Speaking in Inuktitut).

8 THE INTERPRETER: I want to ask
9 Commissioner Qajaq Robinson if you have any questions for
10 Laura, you can ask the questions now.

11 QUESTIONS BY COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

12 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: (Speaking in
13 Inuktitut).

14 THE INTERPRETER: Thank you. I do have
15 questions. Before we start, I believe you're here for a
16 reason. For the truth I know that. I recognize it, your
17 heart, your mind. You came here today, and you spoke your
18 truth, and we're told by our elders that's how we have to
19 bring things out.

20 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

21 Quyanainni for coming and sharing with us
22 about Betsy's life of the fond memories, the happy
23 memories, the joys, her dreams, her strength, her
24 resilience, and also what she went through.

25 And I want to just talk a little bit about

1 this because I think a lot of people who are listening,
2 particularly in the South, might not understand this. You
3 know, so she died 20 years ago at 29, so within less than
4 50 years ago, Inuit were still living out in the
5 communities. They weren't here, so there's been a
6 tremendous amount of change that has happened, and even the
7 community of Rankin Inlet has changed so much. Could you
8 talk a little bit more about that? Would that be something
9 you're comfortable with?

10 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Yes. I'm glad
11 you're saying that. Being married to a non-Indigenous
12 individual, who I love a lot, I've learned to understand
13 their ways of living that I've embraced because my father
14 is non-Indigenous.

15 So, with farmers, you know, they settled,
16 and it's been hundreds of years in one plot of land they
17 own. A lot of people do not realize we don't own land up
18 north. We're not a reserve. We can lease land. So, we
19 came from a nomadic way, my grandparents -- and Lillian
20 could even know that with her grandparents -- before there
21 was a nickel mine, they lived out on the land, very
22 nomadic, and then there became a rage economy.

23 They needed nickel here in Rankin Inlet, I
24 guess for war; I guess the nickel was used for some kind of
25 war or something, so they asked a lot of Indigenous people

1 to come from everywhere to, you know, skilled labour kind
2 of thing and a wage to produce something for, you know, the
3 war, I think. And that was a new way of thinking.

4 To what I understand in Rankin, it wasn't
5 forced. I think what we heard from the elders is a lot of
6 things came easier, you know, such as the house, the shack,
7 the Ski-Doo, the Honda, and then you didn't have to have a
8 dog team and a igloo and a qulliq. You know, a lot of
9 necessities came so quickly, and then parents realized we
10 better send these kids to school so they can replace people
11 that come and fly in, fly out for a while to work.

12 So, it was thought in a good way. I think
13 a lot of things were thought in a good way, but what
14 happened was everybody had their own little tribe in the
15 outside communities, okay, and everybody came from
16 different regions or different communities, and then they
17 came in and then we had to adjust being together. You
18 know, it's a culture shock. It's like imagine a bunch of
19 us out of nowhere had to go into -- and I know it sounds
20 crazy, but it really is this kind of thought -- is when
21 people prepared to live on Mars and, you know, there's 20
22 people deciding they're going to get on this capsule and
23 live on Mars, and they're the wealthy people that have to
24 adjust living with each other.

25 That's how you really have to think about

1 it -- is that you've made people come and force to live
2 with each other with no choice. And that creates a lot of
3 tension and then there was leaders of each family, you
4 know, kind of thing, and there's, you know, one leader
5 becomes leader for everybody when there was four leaders in
6 each of their community or little groups. And there was no
7 succession plan or, you know, adjusting on paper. It was
8 like here. You guys learn to get along, and it's taken a
9 while to, you know, get your roots into these communities
10 and build.

11 Inuit are resilient and it's always going
12 back to elders who say, yes, we live this way, but we live
13 this way now. How you can move forward is: I have these,
14 but you need to tell me how you think it could fix. So
15 there's always that wanting to fix it together and their
16 raw honesty on how to fix things has been amazing is what I
17 can explain. I hope that does explain about remote
18 communities as opposed to southern.

19 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yes, very
20 much, and if I'm correct in that same time frame, there
21 were two residential schools not too far in these areas as
22 well; is that correct?

23 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Yes, and that had a
24 big impact. I do recall, I have my Cousin Susan here, we
25 do recall my family moving away from Chester, so there was

1 a group of family moving away from Chesterfield Inlet and
2 moving closer out here, not right in the community.

3 The thing that I heard, you know,
4 listening to elders having tea, was there was a school in
5 Chester, but then there was a school here, but it wasn't --
6 it was a day school, federal day school, so they were,
7 like, hearing things that weren't going well, you know,
8 with all the sexual abuse in residential school in Chester,
9 and I think they brought every child to that place, you
10 know, and they were raised there really young. Parents
11 were -- you know, 5 years old, taken from them to nothing.

12 But I do recall there was two -- and I
13 think a lot of people that I hear that moved here were
14 saying, "At least we can keep the kids at night," because
15 they were hearing of things, but they weren't too sure, and
16 -- you know, you're going to listen to your priest if
17 there's something going on. Of course, you're going to
18 believe them when the superintendent of the community says
19 this is what it is, so you try and be law-abiding citizens
20 when you come into a community.

21 It was to the point, one day, my
22 grandparents were saying they were in Chesterfield Inlet,
23 and they were told, "You need to bring your kids to
24 school," and they were like, "No, no, we're not too sure.
25 You know, we're hearing things, like, we're not really," so

1 they had hesitance, and they said, "Well, we're going to
2 take them." And so, they said no, no, no. They had a
3 matriarch who said no way, so they moved here. And so,
4 they said at least if they go to school here, it's just a
5 day school.

6 It was quite interesting that they said
7 they weren't sending them regularly to school because
8 during the schools, day school here, kids would be really
9 hard sticks and humiliated kind of thing. I'm sure it
10 happened everywhere, but there was different degrees of
11 humiliation that are unacceptable. I understand that.

12 But to the point that my grandparents were
13 given a paper and they said, "Here, if you bring your kid
14 to school, you'll get this," and they said, "What is it,"
15 because they were self-sufficient, and they said family
16 allowance, and they said, "What do I need family allowance
17 for? I made the kids. I'm going to feed them. I don't
18 need it," to the point that -- I don't know if it was their
19 way of being resistant, but they used the common stove or
20 they needed something to burn like the qulliq or something
21 that they took the cheque and used it to light the fire, so
22 I don't know if it was they're way of saying, "Get lost.
23 You're not going to control me and my kids." So that was
24 the life that, you know, my grandparents lived.

25 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I want to

1 talk to you a little bit about -- actually, one other
2 question -- and in terms of the introduction of alcohol, it
3 was around that same time there was a Hudson's Bay Liquor
4 Store, so that overlapped with the transition into town,
5 the residential schools, and the introduction of alcohol.
6 Okay. I just want to make sure that that context is
7 captured, so thank you.

8 Few questions about Betsy and really
9 around this culture of silence, and you've identified lots
10 of reasons why that happens and the impact of that, and
11 when there's a movement -- right now across the world,
12 really, if you think about it. How do you -- you spoke
13 about having frontline child sexual abuse specialists about
14 educating really looking up prevention and early
15 intervention. At the time when Betsy was here in Rankin
16 and being subjected to the abuse, what kind of services
17 were available here then, and then what do you see as
18 available now?

19 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Very good question.
20 There was a way of -- you know, the whole scooping and
21 sixties scooping where kids were taken, unfit homes, and we
22 do see that doesn't work. We understand that now. I think
23 if things were reported for others, I think -- to what I
24 heard was the definition of severity of abuse, so I've
25 known people that have been taken and moved to other

1 communities if they've been really been abused. So I think
2 the reporting would have helped. I think that's key.

3 And you're asking me about currently how
4 is it. So that's a fine line and a very two-edged sword to
5 speak about in communities. There's the progressive women
6 such as me, who really believe in the end result of what we
7 need kind of thing for the child. So for me, ultimately,
8 when I talk about a child, I say I want a healthy child
9 right to the end, and then there's people saying, you know,
10 when they've been scooped, they're saying, "Maybe if I was
11 Native, I wouldn't have all these issues," you know, or
12 "Maybe if I was put in a Native home, I would be better
13 off." I cannot answer that, but I can answer that I've
14 seen and heard of people who are in their fifties who have
15 been given to other family members in another community and
16 have lived a really good life. And I know that has worked
17 for them.

18 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: So safety
19 and support at an early, early age as much as possible and
20 is needed is the key intervention.

21 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Yes, yes, and also,
22 if you're going to take a child from a home that has been
23 abused in any form, when you're giving it to another
24 relative or another family, make sure their assessed, and
25 make sure that they've been diagnosed if they have any

1 learning disabilities or emotional -- what kind of
2 emotional intelligence they are, so the foster parents or
3 the relatives that take this child are aware of any
4 impediments that the child may have instead of just placing
5 the child there and saying (Speaking in Inuktitut), but if
6 there's --

7 Abuse causes developmental delays. Let's
8 be honest with these people and say they may be delayed
9 emotionally, they may not be reading properly, they may
10 have bed -- wetting their bed, you know, because of this
11 trauma. They may not trust a man or a woman. So those
12 kind of things is working to ensure that the child is safe,
13 but also prevention, you know.

14 I was the president of the Safe Shelter
15 for eight years, and we wanted to roll out this program
16 about safeTALK with little kids in the day cares in schools
17 where there's a little book about, you know, you can't be
18 touched and stuff like that.

19 I think we should be rolling that out in
20 Nunavut kind of thing and then having the real discussion
21 if this really does happen and there's high reported
22 incidents of child, we need to make sure our communities
23 are ready to take these children in or also have some long-
24 term solutions so this child is healthy. We want to
25 prevent if we can.

1 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: You answered
2 my next question. This is a theme, like, this is a pattern
3 I'm seeing in many of the communities we go to, and one
4 particular said as a little girl, she felt it was wrong,
5 but nowhere else in her world was it being confirmed that
6 this was wrong, so she -- it was only later in life.

7 So, those sort of preventions are teaching
8 kids to know to report, right? So you answered my last
9 question before I answered it. Did any of what I raised
10 trigger any questions for you? Okay. (Speaking in
11 Inuktitut).

12 THE INTERPRETER: These are my only
13 questions. I thank you again and thank you for inviting us
14 to Rankin, and we look forward to -- we are here now.
15 Thank you very much. As well, you give us this
16 information, so we want to give you -- one of them is from
17 us. From the inquiry and the other one is an eagle feather
18 from the women in Haida Gwaii.

19 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: -- their love
20 and support through a symbolic gesture, so they've been
21 gathering eagle feathers to give to people who are coming
22 to share and Paul Tootik (ph) has also brought and is
23 presenting gifts to you as well, tea cozies made from manga
24 (ph), so (Speaking in Inuktitut).

25 THE INTERPRETER: I'm going to shut this

1 off now, and I'm going to give you these gifts.

2 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Thank you.
3 This concludes Laura's story, and we'll break for lunch, I
4 believe. Speaking in Inuktitut).

5 THE INTERPRETER: We will resume at 1
6 o'clock. There is food and lunch provisions here if you
7 wish to stay for lunch. Thank you.

8 --- Recess at 11:40 a.m.

9 --- Upon resuming at 1:05 p.m.

10 --- Exhibits (code P01P00P0101)

11 Exhibit 1: Digital image displayed
12 during Laura Mackenzie's public
13 testimony

14 Exhibit 2: September 30, 2004
15 transcript of Reasons for Judgment in
16 the matter of R. v. Ian Adam Kirby,
17 2004 NWTSC 68 (Docket S-1
18 CR2003000103)

19 Exhibit 3: October 25, 2004
20 transcript of Reasons for Judgment in
21 the matter of R. v. Ian Adam Kirby,
22 2004 NWTSC 73 (Docket S-1
23 CR2003000103)

24 **Hearing #2**

25 **Witness: Nikki Komaksiutiksak**

1 In relation to her cousin Jessica Michaels

2 Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette

3 Commission Counsel: Fanny Wylde

4

5 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Good afternoon.

6 Commissioner Audette, I would like to present to you our
7 first witness of this afternoon. This is Nikki
8 Komaksiutiksak, who will be sharing the story of Jessica
9 Michaels, who died at the age of 17 years old in the region
10 of Winnipeg. Before I introduce you to her, Mr. Registrar,
11 if you can please swear in the witness. She would like to
12 give us an affirmation.

13 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Good afternoon Nikki.

14 Do you solemnly after affirm the evidence you give will be
15 the truth, the whole truest and nothing about the truth.

16 AFFIRMED: NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK

17 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you. So, good
18 afternoon, Nikki. Maybe if you could introduce yourself to
19 Commissioner Audette and as well your support person beside
20 you.

21 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Hi, I'm Nikki
22 Komaksiutiksak, and I have my husband, Jason Vandenbrink,
23 here with me, and my aunt, Marie Michael (ph).

24 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you. Can you
25 please specify what was your relation with Jessica

1 Michaels?

2 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Jessica
3 Michaels is my first cousin biologically, but I called her
4 my sister because we lived together from the time that we
5 were born.

6 MS. FANNY WYLDE: So what would you like
7 to share this afternoon about Jessica's story?

8 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So I didn't
9 write anything down, so I have it all kind of coming from
10 my heart.

11 Me and Jessica are a month and a couple
12 weeks apart. She would be 34 years old today, or her 34th
13 birthday is coming up March 23th. She was born in March
14 23rd, 1984, and she -- we lived together, like, really,
15 like my mom and my aunt, being sisters and quite close from
16 what I remember, me and Jessica.

17 My anaanatsiaq would make matching clothes
18 for me and her to wear because we were almost like twins, like
19 there's pictures of us wearing matching outfits, the red
20 one. I remember that.

21 We lived in Nunavut for the first years of
22 our life; Chester, Rankin, and then Jessica moved with
23 Marie to the Fort Smith, and I kind of wandered around
24 Nunavut with my mom. So I lost touch with her for a bit,
25 and then we moved to Fort Smith, and then I was close with

1 her again, and then we moved away. I mean, there's a bunch
2 of different places that me and Jess lived all over the
3 North.

4 When I was 6 or 7, I moved to Winnipeg to
5 live with my aunt. My aunt kept all her sibling's
6 children, so my first cousins, all my first cousins. I
7 moved to Winnipeg when I was 7. And shortly thereafter,
8 Jessica came to live with my cousins and my aunt.

9 My aunt was really -- she's the product of
10 the residential school system, right? Everything that she
11 knew how to be a parent was as a result of the life that
12 she lived in residential schools. She lived in the South,
13 so she taught us as best as she could Inuktitut, the way of
14 life for Inuit. We would eat country food. We started
15 throat singing.

16 Jessica had a beautiful voice, man. Out
17 of all of us, she was the one who had that voice and she
18 just sounded so beautiful. Jessica was badly abused. We
19 were all, but I can honestly say from the time that we
20 lived with our aunt to the time we left, she was severely
21 abused in every way, shape, and form. We're talking like
22 extension words, hangers, being stabbed, being sewn. When
23 we would have an open cut, she would sew us up with a
24 needle and a thread. It was horrible and for stupid
25 reasons, you know.

1 Winnipeg. And they were nice enough to invite us into
2 their home and give us a life of -- even if it was eight
3 months, it was a healthy life. It was normal. There was
4 no hitting; there was no starving; there was peace and
5 laughter.

6 So they gave us a chance of that little
7 bit of life, but because of all of the trauma that we had
8 endured from birth to then, it was too hard for them to
9 handle, so they couldn't really keep us anymore because
10 they lived outside of the city, and we needed services for
11 treatment and counselling and therapy.

12 So I lost track of Jess for about a year
13 and a half because I was 15, and I was pregnant with my
14 first child, and she was unfortunately following a
15 different lifestyle than myself. Then we became
16 reacquainted after my son was born. And I'll never forget
17 because she came to my home -- I had my own place, and I
18 had my son, and I was pregnant with my second already --
19 and she was already mixed up in that lifestyle, and she
20 came over and she visited, and -- I'll never forget, she
21 bought pink wafer cookies for my son, and ever since then,
22 those were his favourite -- she told me that she wanted to
23 quit smoking crack and that she didn't want to live that
24 life anymore.

25 We were 17 when she was telling this to

1 me, so she had already been a couple years deep into that
2 life. And so, I took a piece of paper and I said, "Okay,
3 let's write down everything that you can do to keep busy,
4 like let's find a job, volunteer somewhere, go to school,
5 like, we'll do it together," you know.

6 And then right after that, this was the
7 first time I knew what crack cocaine looked like and she
8 showed them to me. She had a couple pieces, and I grabbed
9 them from her, and I flushed them down the toilet. I said
10 okay, "I'll help you. This is how I'll help you," and she
11 was so mad at me and I couldn't understand why. And it
12 wasn't until she called her friend to pick her up, and this
13 is the man that was supplying her with the crack. This was
14 the man that gave her a roof over her head and sold her to
15 different people. It wasn't until after her death that I
16 understood why she was so mad at me. It was because of who
17 he was and how scared she was of him.

18 So in between, you know, group homes,
19 foster homes, being on the streets, being addicted to drugs
20 and alcohol, being in trouble with the law, being locked up
21 in youth centres and going back out and going back in, at
22 one point, she came to Rankin Inlet. I think she was 15.
23 Lasted a month and a half because she had too much trauma
24 that she had to deal with, and she didn't know how to deal
25 with it, and unfortunately, my family members didn't

1 understand, so she had to come back to Winnipeg.

2 So, a week before her death, that's when
3 she had come over and we had talked about what we can do to
4 help her with not doing crack and not living that life and
5 me writing it down on paper. And she was telling me
6 stories about how, you know, some of the girls that they
7 found in Winnipeg murdered were some of her friends, and
8 that her -- the man that she was associated with was the
9 man that was responsible for some of these deaths. Him and
10 his crew, they were Asians, and she said that they were the
11 ones that controlled all the prostitutes in Winnipeg, and
12 that was some of the reasons why she wanted to get out of
13 that life, that lifestyle.

14 So, that was on a Sunday, she came to
15 visit me, and we had many plans that she was going to sleep
16 over that Friday. It was in August. So, she gave me her
17 number, I called her Friday, and the guy -- it was like I
18 had called all day, there was no answer, and then finally
19 towards the evening, the guy answers the phone and I can
20 barely understand him because he's speaking -- like,
21 English is his second language, so his accent is very hard
22 to understand. So, from what I got from that phone call
23 that Friday was:

24 "Me and her had a fight. I want
25 nothing to do with her. If you see

1 her or talk to her tell her not to
2 come back."

3 But I didn't get a hold of her that
4 weekend, and then August 26, 2001, was a Monday morning,
5 and I got a phone call at 8:00 a.m., and my foster parents
6 found out before I did that her body had been found.

7 So they did their investigations and they
8 spoke to the people that were there, and they deemed her
9 death as a suicide. It wasn't until after, I mean, I was
10 young and I had been going through trauma for so long that
11 I didn't really understand the dynamics of investigations
12 and who you talk to, but when I got a little bit older and
13 just having this feeling that it just did not seem like a
14 Jessica thing to do. And I was speaking to my foster
15 parents and getting the results of the investigation when I
16 was much older and healthier that it didn't match.

17 When they found Jess in Winnipeg in that
18 rooming house, she was on her knees. She had an extension
19 cord wrapped around her neck. She had an X-Acto knife in
20 one hand. The cord that was wrapped around her neck behind
21 her was the window that had bars on it, and she was
22 kneeling down, therefore, she could have just stood up.
23 When you're -- I mean, I'm not a doctor and I'm not any
24 kind of, like, person that studies this stuff, but anyone
25 that is, like, kneeling down and trying to hang themselves

1 when they can't breathe, you would think that they would be
2 able to stand up or grasp for some air.

3 I mean, the toxicology test showed that
4 she had so much crack cocaine in her system that a grown
5 man's heart could have busted. That is what it says in the
6 toxicology test. How does that make sense? If you're so
7 high and you're kneeling on your knees and you have an X-
8 Acto knife in your hand and bruises and scratch marks all
9 over your hands and your arms, like, none of that makes
10 sense. It doesn't -- and given the story that she told me
11 one week before they found her body, that the man that
12 supplied her with crack, it just kind of makes sense that
13 he could have been responsible, him and whoever else he was
14 associated with.

15 That's what I truly honestly believe
16 because Jessica was the kind of person that when she was in
17 distress or even if she was high, she would call my --
18 like, our foster parents every single time. Every single
19 time she was in pain, she needed help, she needed out of
20 something, she always called my foster parents and she did
21 not call them once that weekend.

22 What's even more of a tragedy is that she
23 was deemed a runaway. She was missing when they found her
24 body. She had run away from the youth centre, the juvenile
25 centre, and she was a child in care, and she --

1 Even after her death, we had her funeral
2 in Winnipeg. My foster parents put the funeral on and
3 hundreds of people showed up because we were well-known
4 throat singers in Winnipeg, and when it was time to bring
5 her body back home to Chester, CFS, the justice system,
6 Nunavut, no one wanted to pay for her body to come back
7 home and that really hurt. Why? Why a young girl, 17
8 years old that's from Nunavut, her roots are here and no
9 one wanted her back home. My foster parents were on the
10 verge of selling their house just to bring her body back
11 home.

12 These years and years of disconnect for
13 these -- for us young ones and even today, when you got
14 disconnected from your family, you're almost like a nobody
15 and that's how I felt. All these years of injustice to
16 Jess, even after her death was disgusting.

17 QUESTIONS BY MS. FANNY WYLDE:

18 MS. FANNY WYLDE: If we could take a few
19 steps back. Let's go back to your childhood. You
20 mentioned that you were growing up here in Nunavut and that
21 you were moving from places to places. For our better
22 understanding, can you explain why you weren't with your
23 biological parents?

24 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So I was born
25 in Winnipeg, and my mom and dad were still together and --

1 like three weeks after I was born, we came back, I think,
2 to Chester and then to Rankin, I think, after with my dad,
3 and when I was 3, my dad died from a massive heart attack
4 and I think -- like even when my mom and dad were together,
5 it wasn't a healthy relationship. There was alcohol and
6 abuse on both parties from what I remember at the mere age
7 of 3.

8 When my dad passed away, to me, from what
9 I remember and how I feel, that's when my mom went way
10 down. She was more of an alcoholic, and she couldn't take
11 care of me and keep me safe in Chester and Rankin or Hall
12 Beach or Fort Smith.

13 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Do you know if your
14 parents attended to residential school?

15 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: I think my mom
16 went to the day residential school. So my mom's Inuk and
17 my dad is qallunaat. I don't think my dad went to
18 residential school.

19 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And can you tell me more
20 about Jessica's childhood? Why wasn't she with her
21 biological parents as well?

22 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Like, from my
23 understanding in our culture, if a family member, an elder
24 is wanting you to adopt her child, you just kind of go with
25 it. That's like my understanding. I don't know if that's

1 how it is. And so, I know that an uncle or something of my
2 mom's wanted Marie to adopt Jess -- so my anaanatsiaq
3 wanted my aunt to adopt us, and so, it was just kind of:
4 If an elder said that, you just kind of went with it.

5 Sorry, your question was about her
6 childhood? So, like, I know that my mom and my aunt were
7 close back then, well, from what I could remember, and they
8 did a lot of things, like, I remember my anaanatsiaq, when
9 she was alive, would take me and Jess, and we would sleep
10 there, and she would feed us and make us matching outfits.
11 And then from there, it kind of becomes a blur, you know,
12 being 3, 4. I think 4 years old is when I became
13 reconnected with her again in Fort Smith with my mom.

14 MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, you said that she
15 moved away to Winnipeg at 6 or 7 years old to your aunt's
16 place and not too long after Jessica came to join you, and
17 you said that she lived in an environment with abuse. Can
18 you specify what kind of abuses? Was there any sexual
19 abuse towards the children?

20 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: You know what's
21 so funny, it's like we travelled the world throat singing
22 with my aunt and the four of us, and we were well-known.
23 We made albums, we made posters. Behind closed doors it
24 was friggin' horrible, man. We would have to hold down one
25 another sometimes so that my aunt can do stuff sexually,

1 and that was funny, but it wasn't funny.

2 We had to have the house spic-and-span and
3 if we missed a dust, man, you knew that you were going to
4 get it. The extension cord was the worst because she would
5 always use the end to make sure it hit the side of our
6 ribs, and then we couldn't breathe every time she we would
7 whip it at us, and she would go on and on and on, and she
8 wouldn't stop until we stopped crying, and it was so hard
9 not to cry or to scream, but in order for her to stop, we
10 had to use all our friggin' might and stop.

11 I remember Jessica ate one thing. There
12 was still four of those stupid fish things left and she ate
13 one, and so Agatha went all crazy and she started beating
14 the shit out of her like so hard, and I'll never forget her
15 scream. She was even following her down the stairs with
16 that stupid extension cord, and she was just screaming and
17 she wouldn't stop. And the hangers, those friggin' wire
18 hangers. I don't even allow them in my house anymore. I
19 never allowed them in my house because they're ugly and
20 they hurt. Holy cow, I never felt like that before in a
21 long time.

22 And Jessica, honestly, she was the --
23 every time I tell my story in Winnipeg -- you know, because
24 there's lots of Indigenous people that know how we are,
25 lots of people that know who we are because of our singing.

1 And you know what's funny, every single time I tell this
2 story, they say, "We kind of knew something was wrong. We
3 kind of knew she was abusive." And I'm talking about --
4 like, some of them were social workers and justice
5 officials, and they knew something was wrong, but nothing
6 was ever done. We went years and years with all this abuse
7 and no one said anything.

8 When we went to Atlanta, Georgia, the
9 picture over here of Jessica with the headpiece, we were in
10 Atlanta, Georgia, in 1996 for the Olympic Games. I mean,
11 that's a sweet honour to be young and invited to go sing
12 for three weeks, and that's supposed to be, like, the best
13 memories that you can ever have. You know, we're like
14 11/12, young little Inuk artists.

15 My aunt used to take shoes with, you know,
16 like we would wear the heels, and Jessica ironed her shirt
17 the wrong way. And there she was with that shoe and she,
18 like, started beating on her, and then she accidentally got
19 her on the head, and it was just gushing blood, and then I
20 had go run down the hall and go get ice cubes so that she
21 can friggin' freeze it, so she took a needle and a thread
22 and there she is, sewing it, like that would that hurt.
23 Even the little ones hurt, you know, you'd get a wooden
24 spoon or a whatever, and you start hitting and get it on
25 your fingers, that hurt, you know.

1 In Nunavut, Jessica had a stepdad who was
2 horrible, man. She used to live at the nine-plex. I
3 remember this is my first time in 26 years being back home,
4 and so we went for a drive, and the first thing I wanted to
5 see was the nine-plex. They used to be red, but now
6 they're green, and I wanted to see that door because there
7 was some good memories there, you know, playing with her
8 Cabbage Patch dolls and teasing each other with -- you
9 know, we called it chocolate, but it was anak. I mean, it
10 was just kid stuff, you know.

11 And then we played with the lighter, and
12 we accidentally got the carpet on fire, so we quickly, you
13 know, lit it out, and we put a carpet that you put by the
14 door on top of it, so our aunt or step-uncle couldn't see
15 it, her stepdad, but when he found that, there was the belt
16 and we were in the bedroom. But that's not all that
17 happened in the bedroom.

18 MS. FANNY WYLDE: When you ran away, I
19 believe at 13 years old, that was from your aunt's place?

20 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Yup.

21 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And after, you were put
22 into a group home. Did anyone file a complaint?

23 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So, this is how
24 it happened. I ran away first. That night, police found
25 where I was. They picked me up, told me they were bringing

1 me back to my aunts, and I cried and pleaded and begged for
2 them not to bring me back there because I knew as soon as
3 the door was going to shut, I was going to get that
4 extension cord or that hanger and I totally didn't want
5 that. I mean, to them, I was probably just this rebellious
6 teenager not wanting to go back home, and it wasn't until
7 we were --

8 And it was winter. It was like in
9 November of '96/'97. It was winter of '97 and got out of
10 the cop car, walking towards my aunts, and I'm just like,
11 oh, my God, oh, my God, I don't want to go back in there.
12 I don't want to -- I don't even want them to open the door,
13 so I just took my pants down, took my jacket off, I turned
14 around and I made them look at what was on my body because
15 I knew it wasn't normal, and there was whip marks from the
16 top of my neck to the bottom of any ankles.

17 That one woman cop kind of like -- I'll
18 never forget that, and she was crying and she sat with me
19 in the back. I didn't have to sit in the back by myself,
20 and they drove me right to the hospital. And then, that's
21 when the girls were taken out, the rest of the girls.

22 We had the top child abuse investigator
23 with the hospital. Charles Ferguson, I'll never forget
24 him. He was awesome. He was so gentle but so real and
25 hardcore. They took pictures of me and Jessica's body

1 because we had whip marks everywhere and stab marks
2 everywhere.

3 So, two investigators came to my foster's
4 -- this was when we were living with my foster parents,
5 Steve and Jackie Massey. They're the best things that ever
6 happened to me. So, two investigators came there and we
7 did our statements. Mine was like 46 pages of everything
8 that we could remember that happened to us while living
9 with our aunt. And Jessica's, I think, was, like, going up
10 a hundred because she got the worst. She got the worst of
11 it than all of us.

12 We went to court. And, you know, like,
13 you go to court and they don't name, you know -- because we
14 were young and under CFS care at that time, so they don't
15 name names, but people knew that it was us because I think
16 one of the articles said something about us being Inuit or
17 throat singers or something and it was, like, duh.

18 So we went to court for three or four days
19 of being cross-examined. There's another injustice.
20 Jessica, you know, having to live the life that she lived
21 from the time she was born till the time she was sitting on
22 that stand going through all of this abuse and having to
23 testify that this is indeed what she went through, and that
24 lawyer -- I don't know. You call it the defence lawyer --
25 is grilling her on the stand telling her she's the liar,

1 telling her that she's lying about everything, and that
2 she's the one that did it, like, after everything that she
3 went through and she had to feel that in court.

4 That's so disgusting. Who does that? I
5 can't believe that defence lawyer was okay to do that to
6 this young girl that went through all this shit. Sorry for
7 my language. You know, like, that's so disgusting. That
8 broke her, man. That really broke her. That's when her
9 life went way down.

10 And the -- I mean, I work for justice, so
11 I mean, I got to be careful with what I say here. For
12 someone that did all those things, basically tortured us
13 from the time we were 10 -- for Jess, it was about 10. For
14 me, it was about 7 -- or 9, I mean, 9 for Jess till we were
15 13. Every single friggin' day, there was something that my
16 aunt was mad about and something that she did to one of us
17 to feel hurt, like, that's torture. That was torture
18 because that's beyond like -- being abused that the way
19 that we were when we were living with her was beyond, like,
20 normal, obviously beyond normal, but it was, like, a
21 prison, like, that -- if a prison sentence is even better
22 than the life that we lived.

23 Sometimes we wouldn't even get -- you
24 know, you get three square meals when you're in a treatment
25 centre. We were getting one if we were lucky. We were so

1 friggin' skinny because we weren't allowed to eat certain
2 things, and sometimes she would starve us and we would have
3 to go to the basement and sing a song over and over and
4 over just until we got it perfect, like, being forced to do
5 that.

6 There was a long time after -- I became a
7 mom. I mean, I was 15 when I became a mom. There was a
8 long time after -- and this hurts, but there was a long
9 time where I said I didn't want to be Inuk, and I didn't
10 want anything to do with my Inuk family because no one
11 cared. A long time it took me to get over that and say
12 it's not because of my aunt that I should. Like, identity
13 is so important.

14 MS. FANNY WYLDE: When you went to court,
15 can I ask you what was the outcome of the court hearings?

16 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: It was awful.

17 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Was there any
18 conviction?

19 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So, apparently
20 if you go to church every Sunday and believe in the Lord
21 and you use that, apparently that's good enough for you to
22 get two years of probation with counselling. After all
23 that hurt that we want through, that's all she had to face.
24 Two years of probation and her condition was going to
25 counselling once a week.

1 And she still managed to get two of the
2 girls back. Leslie, the youngest one, and Jamie. Jamie
3 was a baby when she moved in with Agatha, and today, she
4 suffers from schizophrenia. You can't even have a decent
5 conversation with her anymore. Leslie was so badly
6 sexually abused I'm surprised she was okay to go back to
7 Agatha, my aunt. Like, how does -- and she's still with
8 her. And then, there's my cousin, Jessica, who fell
9 through every single cracks within every system possible.

10 I'm surprised I'm sitting here and that I
11 have a university; I some university; I have a good job; I
12 have a husband that loves me; and I have kids that have
13 never been taken away by CFS. I always say this. I always
14 say the strength that I have now more so since I've been 17
15 is because of Jess. She shows me something and does
16 something for me to know that she is there for me and
17 guiding me and helping me. I believe that 100 per cent.

18 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Can you describe the
19 pictures to Commissioner Audette that's on the screen?

20 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So right now,
21 the picture is of me and Jess. We were living with our
22 foster parents together. That was the only time that we
23 were together when we ran away from our aunt. And my
24 foster dad, his dad is getting married, so we're singing
25 "Amazing Grace" in Inuktitut at the wedding.

1 We're living with our foster parents
2 again. Remembering just getting off the school bus after
3 school. And I remember walking down that long driveway
4 with her, just me and her, and we're just talking about how
5 cool it was to go to school and actually make friends
6 because we weren't allowed that before. Probably planning
7 some crazy, you know, how are we going to get in trouble
8 next.

9 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Can you tell me more
10 about Jessica's strengths and gifts?

11 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: She was so -- I
12 mean, I talked about her beautiful voice. She had a voice
13 of an angel. She really did, like, she had beautiful --
14 and she knew it. She'd sing all the time.

15 She was so artistic in every way possible,
16 like, she could take, like, underwear and turn it into a
17 bra somehow, like, she was so awesome that way, even, like
18 -- she put a zipper on a bra, like, in the middle, and it
19 was so cool because you didn't see that in the stores. You
20 know, to me, it's like she invented that. She was so
21 artistic and funny, and like -- but lost at the same time.

22 I remember one time, me and her -- just
23 giving you a little bit of a cute story, I guess. We were
24 at the bedroom at our foster parents' place, and she was
25 painting a chair blue, and she was just always doing

1 something artistic, and then, so she decided, "Hey, Nikki,
2 take your clothes off, let me paint your body blue." She
3 painted my whole body blue, and it was, like, late at
4 night, we're getting ready for bed -- aren't we? We're
5 supposed to be in bed, and our forest parents, "Go to bed."
6 -- so I go to sneak into the bathroom to take the paint off
7 and he shuts the water off. I had to go to bed with a blue
8 body. It's like she knew that that was what was going to
9 happen.

10 MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, when you arrived at
11 your foster parents' house, can you -- you described that
12 you were receiving treatment?

13 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Well, no, like,
14 so, when we were, like, she's the one that convinced me to
15 move in with them because she was living with them first.
16 I was just kind of on the streets living with friends and a
17 few weeks later, she knew how to get -- she always knew how
18 to get ahold of me. She got ahold of me and said, "You
19 should really move here, like, it's so nice, and they don't
20 hit you, and they don't yell at you."

21 And so, she convinced me enough that I
22 went, and they lived in Dufresne, which is about a half an
23 hour drive away from Winnipeg and kind of like no house is
24 really around. And so, I mean, people that foster, I mean,
25 don't really get much money, not that money is an issue,

1 but I remember my foster parents living paycheque to
2 paycheque but still trying to buy us the newest kind of
3 clothes, you know. They had three children of their own
4 already. My foster parents were the ones that ran the
5 medical Inuit centre in Winnipeg, and they had just lost it
6 that time, so it was really hard times for them.

7 And I guess because of how far we were
8 away and, you know, them not having enough gas money to
9 bring us to appointments here and there, like, it was
10 really -- and we were acting out, like, we were going to
11 school in Vermette, which is another 45 minute or half an
12 hour away from where we lived, and -- I mean, we were
13 smoking on school grounds. We were punching out the next
14 person that said anything bad to us because that's -- we
15 were protecting ourselves, right, in our own head, not
16 knowing there was rules and stuff that you have to live by.
17 I think it was just too hard to accommodate the things that
18 we needed.

19 So, it wasn't until after we left our
20 foster home was when we -- I mean, I'm sure they tried with
21 Jess, like I'm sure she tried going to see a therapist and
22 trying to talk, but I'm sure she did, but I can be sure too
23 that that would be so hard for her to deal with over again.
24 And you couple that with, you know, trying to deal with all
25 the crap that you went through from the time you were born

1 and being in a home where you have no family, like, no
2 family at all, and meeting the next kid that seems the
3 coolest that's running away from the group home and showing
4 you the life. That's fun, right, like, it's so easy for
5 peer pressure.

6 MS. FANNY WYLDE: You mentioned Jessica at
7 one point was working from the streets and she had this man
8 who was supplying her with drugs and taking care of her.
9 Did she ever confide in you if he was ever abusive towards
10 her?

11 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: I don't think
12 she had to. I think you just kind of knew that he
13 controlled her, like I'm just remembering how her demeanour
14 was every time he was around compared to when he wasn't.
15 Like, she was very relaxed when she was in my home because
16 he wasn't there. And she was able to talk about things,
17 like, freely and openly, but then when he came around, it
18 was like she was a robot almost, like it was just so --
19 like he controlled her and she knew that. She couldn't say
20 anything or do anything around him.

21 I'm sure -- I mean, like I work -- I don't
22 know if I can say where I work, but I -- I work with high-
23 risk criminals, and I see, you know, how some of these men
24 treat the women that they're with, I mean, I went through
25 abuse with -- I have three children with another man that

1 was severely abusive, and my demeanour when I was around
2 him matched the demeanour that she had when she was around
3 him compared to not. Definitely.

4 MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, at one point, she
5 ended up in a juvenile centre. Can you tell me about that?

6 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Like, multiple
7 times, actually. You know, for having crack cocaine,
8 possessing crack cocaine. I mean, then they were locking
9 girls up that ran away from group homes for periods of
10 times, you know, like, they knew that she was working the
11 streets, so it was quite often she was in and out. I'm
12 sure there's some thefts under \$5,000 there, too.

13 But yeah, there's multiple times that she
14 was in and out of the juvenile centre, but the last time,
15 she somehow was able to run away from there and never went
16 back, and then she was found, right, like --

17 MS. FANNY WYLDE: From when she ran away,
18 how many months or weeks had passed before we found her?

19 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: You know what's
20 funny, when my aunt can say the same thing. When you go
21 through trauma and you go through, like, so much crap in
22 your life, and I was in such a horrible part of my life,
23 too, like days, weeks, months mean nothing. And you really
24 can't keep track of that stuff. So it's so weird. So I
25 can't say how long it was because I really don't know.

1 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And you had mentioned
2 that a week prior to her death, she came to your house, and
3 you made this plan, and the investigation concluded to a
4 suicide. Did she ever mention anything about suicide?

5 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Never. Never,
6 never, never. She would always call someone, like --
7 especially my foster parents. She would always call them
8 when she felt was in distress or sad or anything. Like,
9 she wanted -- a week before they found her, she was making
10 a plan with me to get out of that life. She wanted out.
11 She didn't want to do that anymore. Who makes those plans
12 and then a week later commits suicide, like, that doesn't
13 make sense.

14 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And following the
15 investigation, I believe that several years after, you
16 tried to make contact with the RCMP. Can you tell us? Can
17 you share with Commissioner about that?

18 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So I think it
19 was in 2014, I'm going to say. I was working for the
20 Domestic Violence Prevention Centre in Winnipeg, and I
21 somehow wanted to -- like, this is when I was like okay, I
22 need the world to know that this wasn't a suicide, like,
23 she didn't do this, so I contacted -- somehow, I was given
24 the number to the RCMP D Division in Winnipeg, and I left a
25 voice mail, and I said:

1 "I really would like you to look into
2 this. This is her name. This is her
3 date of birth. I really don't think
4 it was a suicide. Can you please
5 look at her file and get back to me?"

6 It was 20 minutes, 40 minutes maybe, but I
7 know it was within the hour, a detective called me from D
8 Division and said this to me. He said:

9 "I looked over her file and from what
10 I'm reading, it was deemed a suicide.
11 Now, I'm not saying there were bad
12 people in her life and bad people
13 that could have done anything to her,
14 but the person that was in question
15 has since died six years ago, so we
16 know that he's never going to hurt
17 another child or girl ever again."

18 Those were his words to me. That's
19 disgusting, like, who says that? That's saying, Well, it
20 looks like it could have a murder, and it looks like there
21 was someone that was being questioned, and it looks like,
22 you know, he may have had something to do it, but you know
23 what, he died six years ago, so he's not going to hurt
24 anyone else. So who cares really. If she died by suicide
25 or if she was murdered. That's so gross.

1 MS. FANNY WYLDE: She was found August
2 26th in 2009, right?

3 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: 2001.

4 MS. FANNY WYLDE: 2001. And you called
5 the RCMP in 2014.

6 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: About there.

7 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And was it information
8 that the man that was questioned had died six years prior.

9 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Yes.

10 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you.

11 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Jessica was 17
12 when she passed. The guy was 43 years old. 43-year-old
13 Vietnamese man. And I've heard of, like -- when I was
14 younger, I knew that it was, like, on this street you hear
15 that the Vietnamese gang kind of -- they held the pocket of
16 prostitutes in and around Winnipeg. So that's -- like,
17 just hearing that and knowing that you were, like --
18 they're bad people that took advantage of a young girl.

19 MS. FANNY WYLDE: She was missing from
20 juvenile centre as you mentioned. Do you have any
21 information -- did they ever try to find her? Well, were
22 they, like, research to find her?

23 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Like, I think
24 they called my foster parents to say, "Have you heard from
25 Jess?" And, like -- they would say yes, like, we've heard

1 from her, she's okay, she's alive, blah, blah, blah. And
2 so, I know that there was several times when my foster
3 parents would actually pick her up, bring her home, feed
4 her, clothe her, give her some money, and then she'd take
5 off again.

6 Now, when CFS got ahold of that
7 information, they actually told my foster parents that they
8 would take their licence away if they did that again, if
9 they went to go pick her up if she was in need. That they
10 would take their licence away because they're not giving
11 her up to the authorities to go back to juvenile centre.

12 So there were a lot of times they actually
13 did it discreetly, without letting anyone know that they
14 were doing that because -- like, cut everything off from
15 this girl? Like, these systems that are in place are
16 supposed to be there to protect families and children, and
17 they're really damaging and making, you know, these
18 recommendations for children and mothers and fathers to do
19 this or that, meanwhile, it's pushing the families away
20 even more.

21 MS. FANNY WYLDE: I believe your foster
22 parents somehow managed to bring her back home. So, she
23 was buried here in Nunavut?

24 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: In Chester.
25 So, when Jessica passed away, we had a funeral for her in

1 Winnipeg, but there was also a funeral here in Chester and
2 because no one wanted to pay for -- what would they call
3 it, the freight? -- to have her remains brought back home.
4 No one wanted to pay that. No one in Manitoba and no one
5 in Nunavut, so my foster parents --

6 They were going to sell their house to
7 help bring her body back home where she belonged even
8 though they had a family of their own. And just knowing
9 some people, we were able to go on CJOB69 -- I think it was
10 -- in Winnipeg and talk about the injustice of Jessica from
11 the time she was born to even after her death. So they put
12 out donations all across Manitoba and Winnipeg, and we were
13 able to raise enough money to bring her body back to
14 Chester, where they had another --

15 There's her grave. My uncle took that
16 picture for me a couple years ago because I haven't been in
17 Chester since I was probably four years old, like 30 years,
18 so he took that picture for me in 2012. Whatever the mitts
19 say, so I knew. Took that picture for me so that I could
20 have it.

21 MS. FANNY WYLDE: How did the death of
22 Jessica impact you, impacted your life and your family.

23 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Well, I went
24 from having at least someone to having no one family-wise.
25 We really -- like from the time she passed away until now,

1 actually, I always felt like we didn't have a voice in
2 terms of her murder. It wasn't until six years ago that I
3 started getting to know who our family is here in Nunavut
4 and even then, I've met, like, a handful of them. I hear I
5 have hundreds of family members, you know, and I have no
6 idea who they are.

7 She's given me the strength to move
8 forward in life and to have some healing in some ways, but
9 I think this, like, now gives her a voice for me to speak
10 so that crap like this doesn't happen to any other girl in
11 her situation ever again. There's a lot of work to be done
12 for that to happen, but I believe that telling her story is
13 enough to come up with a lot of recommendations in every
14 area of every -- yeah.

15 MS. FANNY WYLDE: If I may ask you, what
16 kept you going all these years because there's Jessica's
17 story, but there's your own story as a survivor as well.
18 What kept you from going on the same road as Jessica?

19 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: What kept me --
20 sorry, say that again.

21 MS. FANNY WYLDE: What kept you going from
22 the same road as Jessica, like, Jessica was working from
23 the streets and --

24 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: That's such a
25 hard question to answer. I mean, I can say somewhere deep

1 down in my heart that I knew everything that -- every kind
2 of abuse and injustice that I ever went through, I knew
3 that it was wrong, and somehow, I had the courage not to
4 fall through, you know, drugs and alcohol, but I give,
5 like, a lot of the strength for me to move on and carry on.
6 I mean, I had no family when I was 13 because I was in
7 different group homes with different strangers in my life
8 everyday. And I really wanted a family, so I made my own
9 family.

10 At 15, I became a mom. At 16, I had my
11 own apartment. I mean, apparently, I was the first in
12 Canada for CFS to allow a young child to have their own
13 place because I was mature enough to take care of my child,
14 and my children are the ones that kept me going even though
15 the three children that I had with -- my three oldest
16 children, their dad. I mean, I was in a relationship with
17 him for seven years from when I was like 14 and a half to -
18 - I was 21, and my aunt was a horrible abuser. He was just
19 a different kind of abuser.

20 MS. FANNY WYLDE: I don't think I have any
21 more questions, Nikki. I want to leave you the space to
22 make recommendations or observations to Commissioner
23 Audette, and after, I will leave her this space to ask you
24 questions as well.

25 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Where do I

1 start? Like, I 100 per cent believe that it's so
2 detrimental for any child to be taken away from their
3 family, from their identity and from who -- where they're
4 from. That takes away from their identity. The child
5 welfare system really needs to find a way to work with
6 family and not against.

7 CFS workers need to be trained. I mean, I
8 know you go to school for four years and textbook this and
9 textbook that, and, yes, you have your field practicum, but
10 there's got to be some sort of screening for some of these
11 social workers that go and think they can police families.
12 Being a social worker isn't about policing them. It's
13 about supporting them and guiding them and working with
14 them.

15 I can't think now. I said so much. I
16 know I have -- I've been talking with my husband. My
17 husband is the best support that I have in my life. He's
18 been there for me. We got married six years ago, and we
19 have a beautiful child here with us today, too. Hi
20 Brandon. And, you know, like a lot of this strength that I
21 have to be able to sit here and do this comes from my
22 husband because he teaches me not to be quiet. He's a
23 teacher, so he likes to talk, and so, therefore, I've
24 learned how to talk. He talks a lot. Just kidding.

25 So -- I mean, I've said so many things,

1 but I really -- when you take away a child's ability to be
2 with their family and know who their family is, it takes
3 away from their identity, and it takes away from what a
4 family is. I mean, your life is revolved around family.
5 You're born with family and to be taken away and not be
6 given the chance, like that -- so horrible. I think that's
7 so important. I'm sure I can go on and on and on, like,
8 I'm foggy with my thinking.

9 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Commissioner Audette, if
10 you have any questions or comments for the witness.

11 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Merci
12 beaucoup, Maître Wylde -- not really because Maître Wylde a
13 very narrow or quite the question that I had about the
14 system or how it went and even what make you stay away of,
15 you know, being suicidal, I guess, or going to drive --

16 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: I was suicidal,
17 and I did --

18 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: But you're
19 still alive.

20 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Right. But I
21 had my struggles too, you know. Even to this day, I still
22 have struggles. Do you know if -- yeah, I have a lot of
23 struggles.

24 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: But you're
25 here.

1 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: But I'm here.
2 I don't know. I don't know why. I don't know how. I
3 can't answer that. Like, it's -- I just do it because I
4 need to.

5 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Maybe
6 there's no answer but just - savourer, en anglais, comment
7 on dit? Maybe it's just a question of enjoying life, and
8 you're a mother of five children, and one is here, so. I
9 always say -- because few weeks ago in Quebec, it was the
10 week of promoting life. The suicidal week awareness, and
11 my girls says things about that, and I say, "You know, we
12 have to do a contract for life." And I think you did one
13 without knowing maybe, but you're an inspiration for us,
14 and it was -- as you can tell, English is my second
15 language.

16 I visualize every word you say like it was
17 there for me. I feel more. I could hear the noise or even
18 the smell of the kitchen or -- you brought me to your
19 world. I didn't like it. Not your world, but the pain
20 that you went through, and the tears, I have tears of
21 anger, and quickly, I had to, with the strength of my
22 grandmother, remind that we have to honour you, honour you
23 and your cousin.

24 I was able to learn a bit about your
25 cousin earlier this morning and blessed to be the one

1 receiving your truth. But also, I feel that we are very,
2 very responsible because there will be another phase within
3 this great journey of the National Inquiry where we sit
4 down with the institutions, where we sit down with people
5 who went through trauma. Some will say expert panel, but
6 me, I'm very honest, the expert are the families, are the
7 survivors. That's for me, an expert.

8 And everywhere we went, across Canada,
9 we've heard one or too many stories and truth like yours,
10 you and your cousin. So for me, it's unacceptable, and if
11 this inquiry can push change or force that change that
12 needs to happen for our children and the system of child
13 welfare system, the justice system, to -- you see that,
14 right? It's there to support and to protect us and also
15 the families.

16 So, I hope Canada heard that. I hope
17 Nunavut government heard that. I hope the other provinces
18 and territories heard your message. We cannot deny that it
19 doesn't exist, that people are falling in cracks or the
20 system is failing and let -- because of your testimony, and
21 how very powerful, there's an obligation for all of us that
22 we have to change, even the Indigenous government. How we
23 do things.

24 There's two moments you made me think
25 again and again because everywhere we go -- about the

1 sentence, you talk about how she was sentences -- how do we
2 say in English, the guy -- it was just two years of being
3 good and make sure you don't repeat, but for you, did you
4 think it was a fair sentence?

5 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Absolutely not.
6 And in fact, the investigators that investigated -- that
7 were part of this investigation, they were going to repeal
8 the judge's decision. Whatever became of that, I don't
9 have no idea. I was already, you know --

10 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: And the
11 other question I have is: You strongly believe that it's
12 not a suicide? Did you make other step that it goes
13 further or --

14 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Like legally or
15 with institution or whatever, I mean, I tried with
16 division, you know, the D Division RCMP in Winnipeg. That
17 didn't help, and so, I kind of just, like, lost hope, and,
18 you know, looking into it further, I mean -- so one of the
19 things that I actually do every year in Winnipeg at the
20 legislative building, they have what they call a "butterfly
21 ceremony," and I sing at that every year to honour Jess,
22 and it's really funny that the first year that I went to go
23 sing at this, I was standing there, and it was cold, and --

24 As you guys are aware, Jessica was adopted
25 to my Aunt Marie here -- so I'm standing there, standing

1 there, and then -- I'm there to honour my sister, Jess -- I
2 called her my sis -- and all of a sudden, out of nowhere --
3 this was a sign. This was definitely a sign because --
4 while I was standing there, her biological sister had been
5 walking to The Forks, no idea that this ceremony was even
6 happening and kind of just walked into the crowd and there
7 she was, just before I was about to go up to sing for
8 Jessica. That was a sign from Jess saying I'm here, and I
9 know that was her biological sister that came.

10 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: C'est beau
11 -- sing and sing.

12 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: I taught my
13 daughters, so -- yeah, I started again when I was 19, and I
14 haven't stopped since. I won't be stopping any time soon.

15 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Merci.
16 Jason, would you like to say something or is there anything
17 you like to talk?

18 MR. JASON VANDENBRINK: Another time.

19 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:
20 If I can say to your husband, it's
21 beautiful to see that men are walking beside us, the women.

22 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: There are good
23 men out there, and I've definitely been blessed to find a
24 man that respects me and supports me and is there for me,
25 loves me and my children, and -- you're awesome. I love

1 you so much.

2 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Well, we're
3 supposed to give you a gift and we want to do it if you
4 accept. But before I pass the mic to my grandmother, I
5 want to say you gave us a gift for all of us, but for me,
6 I'll say you gave me a gift that we didn't choose that. We
7 are in that situation, but there's a moment in our life
8 that we are breaking that circle or cycle and you're good
9 example that, yes, we can stop it and give a better life to
10 our children. Thank you. Because we need role model like
11 that. We need example like you, we need to prove that we
12 are strong, we are beautiful, we are amazing and weak and
13 cry, but we can say that we're creating a new chapter, and
14 for me, it's a gift. Merci beaucoup.

15 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Quyanainni.

16 MS. BERNIE WILLIAMS: -- say howa (ph) to
17 you, Nikki, for sharing your journey with us, and as
18 painful it is, thank you for sharing about Jess and to your
19 aunt.

20 As I explain about -- the eagle feathers
21 have come -- started their journey from my home in Haida
22 Gwaii. These eagle feathers have made several stops, some
23 family members donating them all across Canada and these
24 have been donated by the Sechelt First Nations band in
25 between them, Vancouver Island, Vancouver at the Sunshine

1 Coast, and I'd like to offer this gift to you.

2 There is some tea -- what do you call
3 those -- hats? Cozies? Tea pads? You're not supposed to
4 say that. That's supposed to be our secret. There's some
5 Labrador tea there and some Arctic cotton.

6 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Avant de
7 terminer, Maître Wylde; we'd like to ask Michelle if she
8 would give it to you. I need your strength, and I need a
9 hug also. It was a tough, tough session. A beautiful but
10 tough. Merci.

11 MS. FANNY WYLDE: I would like to ask for
12 this session to be adjourned. Thank you.

13 --- Exhibits (code: P0191190102)

14 Exhibit 1: Folder containing three
15 digital images displayed during the
16 public testimony of Nikki
17 Komasksiutiksak

18 --- Whereupon the adjourning at 2:27 p.m.

19

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21

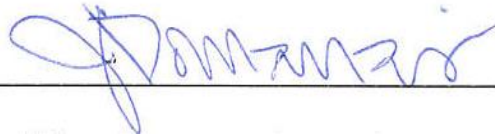
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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I have, to the best
of my skill and ability,
accurately transcribed from a pre-existing recording
the foregoing proceeding.



Jovelle Domanais, Court Reporter