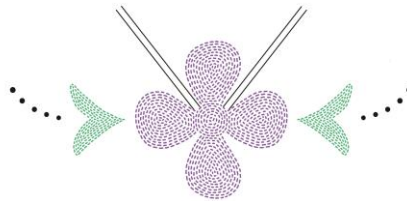


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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 I Statement Gathering
Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre
Whitehorse Yukon**



PUBLIC

June 1, 2017

Statement - Volume 4

Karin Stephens, In relation to Shirley Stephens

**Statement gathered by Fanny Wylde,
Commission Counsel**

CHAREST REPORTING SERVICES

II

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NOTE

Redactions to this public transcript have been made pursuant to Rule 55 of the Commission's Legal Path: Rules of Respectful Practice, which provides for "the discretion to redact private information of a sensitive nature where it is not material to the evidence to be given before distributing the information to the Parties. The National Inquiry will consider the public interest in releasing this type of information against the potential harmful impact on the individual whose personal information is at issue."

Public - Karin Stephens

1 June 1, 2017
2 Whitehorse, YT
3
4 FANNY WYLDE: Good morning, Karin.
5 MS. STEPHENS: Good morning to you.
6 FANNY WYLDE: Before we start to take your story, the
7 commissioners would like to offer you some
8 tobacco. Would you like to accept this gift?
9 MS. STEPHENS: Thank you.
10 FANNY WYLDE: Okay. And also before we start,
11 could -- do you prefer to affirm or swear in
12 order to receive your oath?
13 MS. STEPHENS: Is affirm on the Bible?
14 FANNY WYLDE: No. If that's your choice, you can do
15 only an affirmation if you want.
16 MS. STEPHENS: Sure.
17
18 KARIN STEPHENS, affirmed.
19
20 FANNY WYLDE: So what do you want to share with the
21 commissioners today?
22 MS. STEPHENS: I just want to share my mother's story.
23 FANNY WYLDE: Okay.
24 MS. STEPHENS: M'mm-hmm. And just some of the
25 questions that I had around the investigation and
26 her death.
27 FANNY WYLDE: Okay. What was your mother's --
28 mother's name?
29 MS. STEPHENS: Shirley Anne Stephens.
30 FANNY WYLDE: Okay. And you can go [indiscernible]
31 read your document, or --
32 MS. STEPHENS: Yeah. I -- yeah. Otherwise, I'll
33 be --
34 FANNY WYLDE: It's okay.
35 MS. STEPHENS: -- all over the place, so I just want
36 to say that I'm here to honour my mom's life and
37 memory by asking that her name be added to the
38 sadly, rapidly growing list of families who have
39 had little or no, shoddy investigations done by
40 the justice system.
41 My mom was Shirley Anne Stephens. She was
42 born on January 9th, 1937, to Florence and
43 George Bruce [sic] or North Vancouver, BC. She
44 was the fourth oldest of 16 children. Life
45 wasn't always kind to my mom, but she went out of
46 her way to ensure she treated others with
47 kindness. She always had a smile and a huge -- I

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1 can't say it -- just a "hi" like her. It was
2 always a, "Hi, there, Sunshine." It was loud
3 and -- and that was for all the people that she
4 met.

5 My cousins remembered her as someone who
6 made people feel special and loved, and they all
7 say she smelled fantastic. Everyone said she had
8 a gorgeous smile, was funny, and her laughter was
9 contagious. And most of the time, her life was
10 bubbly and full of life. And following is a
11 quote from one of her nieces:

12
13 Goodness, she was gorgeous. I always got so
14 excited when I knew she was coming for a
15 visit. Her independent spirit, beauty, and
16 positive energy captivated me as a small
17 child, and I've been drunk on that influence
18 ever since.

19
20 I remember my mom being there for the older
21 people in her life. She -- she was like her own
22 personal Meals on Wheels, but she didn't just
23 bring meals. She made sure that the people got
24 out and about and were able to go to different
25 events and weren't just left in their homes
26 alone. And she was also a go-to person for those
27 who needed a sympathetic ear.

28 Sadly, the men in my mom's life were not
29 always ideal. She tended to be drawn to the type
30 of men who ended up using or abusing her, and
31 this may have stemmed from the abuse she received
32 when she was younger.

33 The last person she had been with in a
34 relationship -- and it had ended a while before
35 her death -- was one of those users. We found
36 out that he had some of my mom's property, which
37 is mainly her firearms -- my mom was an avid
38 hunter -- in his home. And another friend had
39 said that these things were in my mom's home
40 previous to a disappearance, but the RCMP didn't
41 consider him to be suspicious and neither did he
42 return the firearms.

43 My mom drowned in the Yukon River, and
44 that's an undisputed fact. But how she ended up
45 in the river was never properly investigated.
46 Too many questions were left unanswered. And
47 back in those days, I didn't have the ability or

Public - Karin Stephens

1 the know-how to push for more details, for more
2 information.

3 Years later, when I asked for a copy of my
4 mom's police report, I was told that the records
5 had already been destroyed. Doctors' reports
6 weren't made available, and I didn't learn until
7 much later that there was still a coroner's
8 report. And just recently, with the help of a
9 dear friend, I was able to obtain a copy of that
10 report, and, luckily, it still contained a copy
11 of the police report.

12 The report showed no follow-through on what
13 little investigating they did, leaving even more
14 unanswered questions. In the coroner's report
15 itself, it was very obvious by looking at the
16 time lapse between receiving the body and
17 concluding his report that the coroner had no
18 intentions after asking for an investigation.

19 And although there was not enough evidence
20 to prove beyond a reasonable doubt, the coroner's
21 conclusion was that she committed suicide. And I
22 would like to ask and see that be formally
23 changed, and I'd also like to have my mom's
24 ethnic group changed. She wasn't Caucasian --
25 not that that's an insult, but my mom was very
26 proud of her First Nations heritage,
27 Tsleil-Waututh and Manitoba Metis.

28 I think out of all this I'd like to hear --
29 as many of the families have asked, I'd like to
30 hear an apology made to the families all across
31 Canada from the RCMP and the coroner's offices
32 for the lack of any kind of give a damn. I know
33 I'm living in the dream world, but everyone
34 deserves the same respect and dignity, no matter
35 what the colour of their skin or their status in
36 life. I want to see the indifference stop. I
37 understand that everyone has their own way of
38 dealing with events in their lives and not
39 everyone can move on, but perhaps this formal
40 recognition can be something to help the families
41 find their way onto the healing path.

42 There's still far too much lateral violence,
43 and we can say we won't be like our mothers or
44 our fathers, but without proper guidance, how can
45 we ever move beyond the path?

46 FANNY WYLDE: Thank you, Karin. Would you expect to
47 deposit your written testimony as well?

Public - Karin Stephens

1 MS. STEPHENS: Thank you.
2 FANNY WYLDE: So we will submit that to the
3 Commissioners. Also, I just want to go back to
4 your mother's history. You said that she faced
5 several incidents of abuse. Can you tell me more
6 about that? What kind of abuse? Did she go
7 through residential school?
8 MS. STEPHENS: No. My mom's siblings -- sorry --
9 FANNY WYLDE: It's okay.
10 MS. STEPHENS: -- were in a -- I think they called
11 them -- it's just a Catholic school, like the day
12 schools, not an actual residential school.
13 FANNY WYLDE: M'mm-hmm.
14 MS. STEPHENS: I think my grandmother was.
15 FANNY WYLDE: And forms of abuse -- and forms of abuse
16 that was -- that she faced?
17 MS. STEPHENS: It began with her brother.
18 FANNY WYLDE: Okay.
19 MS. STEPHENS: Yeah. And then continued, the men that
20 she dated or married ...
21 FANNY WYLDE: How old were you when your mother passed
22 away?
23 MS. STEPHENS: 23. Thank you.
24 FANNY WYLDE: Okay. You were 23. Can you please
25 share with the Commissioners how did this
26 incident impact your life, in what way?
27 MS. STEPHENS: Well, my first husband -- I called him
28 "my husband," the common-law. We were engaged --
29 had passed away three months prior to that in
30 May, in 1980. So I don't -- I don't remember an
31 awful lot of stuff. My aunts had told me that I
32 had those things pretty good, but I don't
33 remember a lot from [indiscernible] breaking
34 quite a bit then, so -- yeah.
35 FANNY WYLDE: And you talked about the RCMP. They
36 said -- in your opinion, they didn't properly
37 investigate. Did they ever open up a file --
38 MS. STEPHENS: Yes.
39 FANNY WYLDE: -- and investigate -- investigation?
40 MS. STEPHENS: Yes.
41 FANNY WYLDE: Okay. Would you like to deposit --
42 MS. STEPHENS: Yes, thankfully.
43 FANNY WYLDE: -- this police file for the
44 commissioners to see?
45 MS. STEPHENS: Yes.
46 FANNY WYLDE: Okay. Can I look through it, the police
47 report?

Public - Karin Stephens

1 MS. STEPHENS: M'mm-hmm. Kind of mixed in there of
2 the -- it's a combination of the coroner's report
3 and the police report.
4 FANNY WYLDE: Okay. And at first, you said that you
5 asked for records, and the answer that you
6 received were negative; right?
7 MS. STEPHENS: As I said, you know, I wasn't in any
8 frame of mind back then to know what to do or how
9 to push for anything, and then when the time came
10 when I finally got my -- my act together, I
11 started asking questions, asking for reports.
12 And that's when I was told that the police report
13 was no longer available. And it didn't cross my
14 mind that it would be something separate and
15 apart from the coroner's report, so I never
16 really looked any further. And then later in --
17 in a job that I had, I discovered that there was
18 actually still a coroner's report that was
19 available.
20 FANNY WYLDE: How did you discovery that there was a
21 coroner's file available?
22 MS. WYLDE: How exactly did you discover -- did
23 someone contact you or ...?
24 MS. STEPHENS: No, it was actually because I worked in
25 the department where that -- it was in storage.
26 I worked there.
27 MS. WYLDE: Okay.
28 MS. STEPHENS: I wasn't smart enough to ask for a
29 copy. Probably wouldn't have gotten it, though.
30 MS. WYLDE: Can you share with the commissioners in
31 what circumstances the death of your mother
32 occurred? Like, did she disappear and a few days
33 after they found her? Can you tell us more
34 about --
35 MS. STEPHENS: No, my mother had been -- from what I
36 understood, my mother had been at the bar
37 drinking and had left the bar and that was the
38 last -- it does say in there that there had been
39 a call-out for the RCMP to come because there was
40 somebody passed out in the parking lot of the
41 bar, but it was not my mother.
42 MS. WYLDE: Okay.
43 MS. STEPHENS: Yeah, it wasn't my mom.
44 So I guess my mom's purse was found in the
45 parking lot, plus also her car was still there.
46 I'm not sure if it was a day later or how ...
47 That a friend made a report that she wasn't home.

Public - Karin Stephens

1 MS. WYLDE: Since I don't have -- since I just
2 received the coroner's report and also the police
3 file, can you give me more details about how they
4 found her, and was it someone of the family that
5 called the RCMP to look for her or ...?
6 MS. STEPHENS: No. It was a family friend who said
7 that she -- that this was very unusual for her,
8 that she wouldn't leave her vehicle there or her
9 purse behind. Also I think it says that because
10 she had two dogs at home that it was unusual that
11 she had not returned home.
12 So I think it was the friend that made the
13 initial report. A friend of hers made the
14 initial missing person's report.
15 And so they did -- I have to give them that.
16 They did, you know, look around and -- but -- and
17 then there's little bits and pieces in there of
18 what investigating they did do.
19 But my mom's body was found a week -- a week
20 later by -- by a person who ran one of the river
21 boat tours.
22 MS. WYLDE: Okay. So she disappeared and a week later
23 they found her body in the Yukon River?
24 MS. STEPHENS: Yes.
25 MS. WYLDE: Was there any -- was there anyone ever
26 accused --
27 MS. STEPHENS: No.
28 MS. WYLDE: -- of her disappearance or witnesses
29 or ...? No?
30 MS. STEPHENS: Not that I know of.
31 MS. WYLDE: So nobody was ever accused or convicted?
32 Okay.
33 MS. STEPHENS: They never investigated enough to ever
34 see.
35 MS. WYLDE: I have heard you making some sort of
36 recommendation or request regarding the RCMP,
37 like an apology. How exactly -- what do you mean
38 exactly by an "apology" and what form would you
39 like this apology?
40 MS. STEPHENS: I think all the RCMP across Canada --
41 it's the same stories. You're hearing it over
42 and over and over again. There was no
43 investigation even started. They didn't really
44 do anything.
45 It's the same with my mother's. When you
46 get a chance to actually look at the report, that
47 report just leaves many more unanswered

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1 questions. Nothing was followed up. It was --
2 there was never any complete -- you know, just
3 little bits and pieces here, and I think -- I
4 think my biggest complaint is the coroner
5 just ...
6 And again, that's happening everywhere. It
7 is even happening now, today, these young kids
8 going in the river in Thunder Bay and they're
9 saying, oh, well. It was some incident they --
10 they are depressed. They are committing suicide.
11 They're -- bullshit. Investigate it.
12 Even with my mother's, if my mother's was a
13 suicide, then prove it. Prove it. Don't get a
14 body, do your autopsy report and that's it and
15 say yeah, just another Indian in the water;
16 right? Don't do that. Even if she wasn't an
17 Indian, don't do that to any person. You know,
18 follow through. Give some -- you know.
19 MS. WYLDE: And would you say that your mom was having
20 suicidal thinking or --
21 MS. STEPHENS: No, no, you look at that. There was
22 one statement in there that said that she had
23 been, you know, upset about a relationship. That
24 relationship ended four months earlier, and I'm
25 sure it was probably an ongoing thing, but all
26 the other reports there say that no, she was
27 happy, she was excited and -- you know ...
28 MS. WYLDE: You said also that you would like to --
29 you wished that there could be a change of ethnic
30 identity to your mom.
31 MS. STEPHENS: Yes.
32 MS. WYLDE: That's your request?
33 MS. STEPHENS: Yes.
34 MS. WYLDE: Okay. She was identified as a Caucasian
35 in her birth certificate or in the police files
36 and the coroner's files.
37 MS. STEPHENS: On the death certificate.
38 MS. WYLDE: Yeah, I see that you have pictures with
39 you. Do you want to tell me more about those
40 pictures and show it to the camera, please?
41 MS. STEPHENS: Okay. I just have the -- one of the
42 later pictures of my mom. I don't have too many
43 of just before her death, but this is just one
44 picture of her. And that would be at work. She
45 used to work in several of the bars here in
46 Whitehorse, and this is just one of my favourite
47 pictures of my mom. It's five generations

Public - Karin Stephens

1 picture.
2 MS. WYLDE: Can you tell me who is who?
3 MS. STEPHENS: You won't be able to see there, so ...
4 This is my mom here.
5 MS. WYLDE: Okay.
6 MS. STEPHENS: And her mother is here. And her
7 mother's over there. And my ta'a [phonetic], my
8 great-great-grandmother. This little fellow
9 [sic] is me, and that's my bigger brother.
10 MS. WYLDE: Okay. How many brothers and sisters were
11 you?
12 MS. STEPHENS: I have a younger brother and an older
13 brother. I wasn't raised with my older brother.
14 MS. WYLDE: Okay. Can you tell me why you weren't
15 raised with your older brother?
16 MS. STEPHENS: He was raised by his father, my mom's
17 first husband.
18 MS. WYLDE: Okay. Can you tell the Commissioners more
19 about your mother's gifts and her qualities?
20 MS. STEPHENS: I didn't know my mother very well. I
21 only came to live with her when I was 14.
22 She had troubles earlier in her life and --
23 but she was resilient. She was a strong woman
24 and did so much for other people. She was always
25 looking after other people and there for them
26 and -- yeah.
27 MS. WYLDE: Can you tell me why you weren't raised by
28 your mom, that you arrived at 14 only?
29 MS. STEPHENS: Yeah, my mom left -- I was born in BC
30 as well, in North Vancouver as well. My mom left
31 our family and came here, actually, in 1963.
32 Started a new life. So I was raised by the
33 stepfather.
34 MS. WYLDE: With your younger brother?
35 MS. STEPHENS: Yes.
36 MS. WYLDE: Okay. Is there anything else you would
37 like to share with the commissioners?
38 MS. STEPHENS: No, I think -- did I miss anything?
39 No.
40 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: She's speechless. My sister's
41 speechless.
42 MS. WYLDE: I would probably have one last question
43 for you, Karin.
44 MS. STEPHENS: Sure.
45 MS. WYLDE: The commission's mandate is not only to
46 hear your stories, but our mandate is to see how
47 we can honour the lives and these women and

Public - Karin Stephens

1 girls. Would you have suggestions to the
2 commissioner to give and give them ideas or a
3 recommendation on how to honour your mom?
4 MS. STEPHENS: I think to -- by just making sure that
5 this doesn't just die, all this work and the
6 stuff from the families, that it goes somewhere
7 and that hopefully, as I said, something comes
8 from it. This has to stop. These are people's
9 family, and it doesn't matter what their walk of
10 life. They're important to their families and
11 their lives mattered and they shouldn't be just
12 put under a rug and ignored.
13 So yeah, I would like to see that this is
14 not just ended.
15 MS. WYLDE: Well, thank you, Karin. Anything else?
16 Any questions? Okay.
17 So in honour of the reciprocity protocols,
18 since you shared your story with the
19 commissioners and this is a gift that you give to
20 them, they would like to share with you a gift.
21 And it's little seeds that they have given to
22 each person who comes and shares their story.
23 So thank you for your story.
24 MS. STEPHENS: Thank you.
25 MS. WYLDE: And [Indigenous language spoken].
26 MS. STEPHENS: [Indigenous language spoken].
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Public - Reporters' Certification

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(PROCEEDINGS ADJOURNED AT 11:39 A.M.)

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IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto
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June, 2017.

Cordia Wong [Pages 1 to 5, 1.21]
Official Reporter

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IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto
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Patricia A. Bentley [Pages 5, 1.22 to 10]
Official Reporter