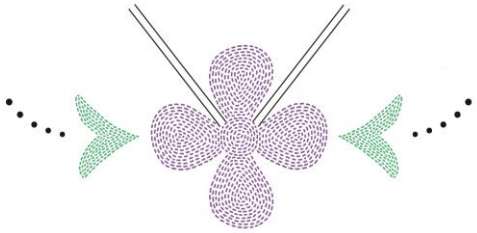
National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls

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
Hilton Vancouver Airport Hotel
Fitzgerald Room
Metro Vancouver, British Columbia



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Friday April 6, 2018

Public Volume 111 (a)
Halie Bruce
In relation to Elisabeth Hill

Heard by Commissioner Brian Eyolfson
Commission Counsel: Fanny Wylde

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APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations	No Appearance
Government of British Columbia	Jean Walters (Legal counsel)
Government of Canada	Anne McConville (Legal counsel)
Heiltsuk First Nation	No Appearance
Northwest Indigenous Council Society	No Appearance
Our Place - Ray Cam Co-operative Centre	No Appearance
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada	No Appearance
Vancouver Sex Workers' Rights Collective	No Appearance
Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak/Women of the Métis Nation	No Appearance

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Registrar's note: Although this hearing was original held in camera, the witness subsequently requested that her testimony be made public. For this motion and resulting order, refer to Public hearing transcript Volume 111(b).

Metro Vancouver, British Columbia

--- Upon commencing on Friday, April 6, 2018 at 9:21

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you, Blu. Good morning, Commissioner Eyolfson. Before we do start this hearing, I would like to ask for an in-camera order motion.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Counsel, could you provide -- explain a little bit about why you're asking for an in-camera order?

MS. FANNY WYLDE: This morning, we are asking for an in-camera order in order to prevent -- the privacy of the witness and her family and for her level of comfort this morning to be sharing. So, I would ask for an in-camera order.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Thank you. I will grant the requested order and read the terms.

After considering the submissions in support for an order declaring the testimony and evidence of Halie Bruce in camera, we grant the request. Accordingly, the Registrar is instructed to clear the room, close the webcast temporarily and to ensure no media is present. Only the witness, her support people, Commission counsel,

counsel representing parties with standing, and parties with standing may stay. All in attendance are directed that they must keep confidential all information they hear during the course of this witness' testimony.

All exhibits, as may be received during the course of this witness' testimony shall also be received in camera, and marked "C", and will not be accessible to the public, unless and until this order is altered in writing by the Commissioners.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you, Commissioner Eyolfson. I would like to present to you our first witness of today, her name is Halie Bruce. But, before I do let her share, I will ask Ms. Registrar to please swear in the witness, and she would like to provide oath with an eagle feather.

MS. GLADYS WRAIGHT: Prior to that, we need to identify the parties that are in the room. My name is Gladys Wraight, I am Registrar.

MS. BOBBY-JO VIRTUE: Good morning, my name is Bobby-Jo Virtue, I'm a special advisor to Commissioner Eyolfson.

MS. DAWN GAUDIO: I'm Dawn Gaudio, support of Blu Waters.

MS. MARY THOMAS: Mary Thomas, health support with the IRSSS.

MR. ERIC REID: Eric Reid, the recording technician.

MS. JEAN WALTERS: I'm Jean Walters, I'm with the B.C. government.

MS. ANNE MCCONVILLE: Anne McConville with the Government of Canada.

MS. BRIGETTE KRIEG: Brigette Krieg (ph) with Research, MMIWG.

MS. MARK HANLEY: Mark Hanley, health support.

MS. PENNY KERRIGAN: Penny Kerrigan, Community Relations.

MS. FLORENCE CATCHEWAY: My name is Florence Catcheway.

MS. LAUREEN BLU WATERS: Hi, I'm Blu Waters and I am one of the Grandmothers of the Grandmother's circles, and a Grandmother to Commissioner Eyolfson.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Brian Eyolfson, Commissioner.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Fanny Wylde, lawyer, National Inquiry.

MS. ARDITH WALKEM: Ardith Walkem. I'm here as a family support with Halie.

MS. HALIE BRUCE: I'm Halie Kwanxwa'logwa Bruce, witness.

MS. GLADYS WRAIGHT: Thank you. So, you are affirming with the eagle feather today, Halie? Halie Bruce, do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you will give today will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: I do.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you, Gladys. So, this morning, Commissioner Eyolfson, we have Halie Bruce here, who is here to share her own story as a survivor of violence, but she will also be sharing about her sister, Elisabeth Hill, who went missing in 1999 in the region of Toronto, Ontario, and to this day she is still missing. She will also be sharing her sister, Julie's, story, who died -- Lisa, I'm sorry. Who died at the age of 15 years old.

So, I will let Halie present herself to Commissioner Eyolfson. And, a bit about your history?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: (Speaking in Kwak'wala). My name is Kwanxwa'logwa, which means Woman Thunder. I'm a member of the Namgis/Kwa'kwa'kawakw, and Tlingit people, as well as Scottish-Canadian.

I was born in Vancouver, and taken into foster care when I was 7, along with my sister Lisa. And, I ran away so frequently from foster care that eventually -- running away to my grandmother, that they finally let

her take me to our home community, my mother's home community, which was Alert Bay. And, there I lived with my uncle and his family, which I later learned culturally was the right thing to do. So, I was given benefit of my culture and my identity.

But, to begin my story, I think my story starts with my mother, Elisabeth, who is alive. She is either 85 or 87, we're not sure, because the church record says one thing and the government record says another. But, her name is (speaking in Kwak'wala language), and she was raised by her grandparents in the village of Tsaxis, which is Fort Rupert at the north end of Vancouver Island, until she was about 10 or 11, and then had to either go to the Indian day school in Alert Bay or be taken into a residential school.

But, she was one of the last of two children left in the village at that time, so she had benefit of our culture and our traditions, and being raised within that transitional period, even after the potlatch bans, and the -- some of our chiefs were imprisoned, some of our family members were imprisoned because of the potlatch bans. And, she got to witness, you know, the potlatch in a way that it was underground. But, she spoke our language, kwakwala, fluently, lived amongst her grandparents and the other grandparents who remained in the village, because many of

the children were -- all the other children were gone except for one cousin and her. And, the parents went with them, either to be close to the children, work in the canneries or -- well, basically that was it. They went to work in the canneries, but really to be close to the kids.

So, she grew up in that environment and then married. When she married, she had three children, my eldest siblings -- there's 10 of us, five girls and five boys. And, her first husband was a (speaking in Kwak'wala language) man. Very gentle man. Loving. He came down with an illness. He got testicular cancer. And, by that time, my mom and him had had my three eldest siblings, and my oldest brother, who is hereditary chief today, was only just an infant at the time. So, they moved to Vancouver for health reasons, to have his treatment done, and she had my three older siblings with her.

When it became -- when he got sicker and sicker, there was concern about my mom, who was working different jobs in the city. Part-time jobs, wrapping Christmas presents at the department stores, working in a bakery, doing whatever she could to help support the family and looking -- you know, seeing her husband. The family grew concerned that she wasn't able to care for the kids, so his parents came to get them on the agreement that they would eventually be returned to her.

And then when he got so sick, they thought that he was going to die, you know, they took the kids back to our village. And, he recovered, but by then their relationship had broken down and his parents wouldn't return her kids. And, I believe that's when my mother became broken, when she lost her children.

And, she began drinking alcohol, and met a non-indigenous man who became her second husband, and the father of my sister Liz Anne (ph), who is missing. And, they had two children together, but he was a very violent man. My mother's first husband was a very gentle man. And, I actually came to know him very well and loved him, actually. He was a very, very kind man by then.

And, even though he had recovered, their relationship didn't, and she ended up with Liz's father, who was very violent, a violent alcoholic. And, I had to interview my mom for a Gladue report I wrote for my nephew, Liz's son. So, I got to know a lot of the intimate details about what happened in that relationship, for their grandson, Liz's son, when he was being sentenced.

And, I don't know if you are familiar with the Gladue reports, but they're written for Aboriginal offenders who are being sentenced. And, you know, you cover a person's personal background, and helping the judge to take judicial notice of that history of colonization and

what have you. So, I got to know a lot about the story about Liz's father and my mom's relationship. And, apparently, he beat my mother quite regularly.

And, eventually, that relationship broke down when he had an affair with my mother's cousin and she became pregnant. But, he told my mother that, "You will never have these kids." So, this is her second set of kids, the fourth and fifth child that she had, my brother and my sister, Liz Anne. And so, she left. But, she left without her children which caused further wounds and breaks in her spirit.

By then she became really deep into her addictions, her alcohol. And then became pregnant with my -- I call them my (indiscernible), the last five of us are all from my mother's third marriage. And, that was my father, who is also a non-Indigenous man, but a very gentle man, but deeply, deeply alcoholic, and also involved in the fishing industry. So, he was in and out of town, and in and out of our lives, and not really there much.

So, my mother basically had all five of us in pretty quick succession. And, it was basically a single Indigenous woman living in the city of Vancouver, in the Downtown Eastside, and struggling with her own alcoholism. And, she was quite a binge drinker and -- I do remember her being with other men who would -- we would hear beating

her. The worst one being a guy named Chuck. He would put cigars out on her. And, my brother and I -- we try to help her heal. We would put medication on her burns. And, my brother, Gavin, was later lost at sea; he was also a fisherman. Him and my dad got caught in a storm, and went missing, and they were found later. But, my brother, Gavin, he was a year older than me, and him and I basically looked after our sister, Lisa, and the other kids that came after them. But, we also looked after our mother.

And, our mother would have parties. We lived in the projects in Chinatown, in the Downtown Eastside, which was low-income housing, where a lot of Indian families lived. There was some beauty in it because there was so many Indigenous kids. There was this wonderful woman named Alice Hamilton, and I know Jamie, her daughter, testified earlier this week. And, Alice would round us up, all the Indigenous children, and take us to the Friendship Centre. You know, even though it wasn't -- my tradition is the big house and the potlatch, we would do things in the Friendship Centre, and we had a sense of community, and we could go to Alice when things got bad.

But, we went through quite a bit of poverty. I remember my brother and I going through the dumpsters at the wholesalers, you know, where the produce wholesale, because they were right down near the projects, to feed

ourselves and our younger siblings, who we looked after. And, I was maybe 5 or 6, and my brother was only a year older than me, and Lisa a year younger. Although, Lisa didn't come to us again until she was about, just turned 4 and a half I think, because she had drank liquid Drano when she was a year and a half. We were playing unsupervised, as usual, and somebody had left a jar of liquid Drano on a porch. I don't know why. And, she drank that, and she had to -- in the hospital, they had to rebuild her esophagus and part of her stomach. So, she spent a lot of her early years in the hospital. But, then, she came back with us, and by then we had two other siblings, my youngest brothers, one of whom is severely FASD, and who my brother and I basically cared for.

And, my mom would bring home parties. And, I remember there was, like, some good people involved in that. I saw really positive things. Like, my mother is a very open and accepting person. I remember the first lesbian marriage I saw was cousins of my mom who got married at the Balmoral Hotel and had the reception at our house. And, my mother's cousin, who in our tradition is like her brother, was also a gay man, who -- he had a lot of conflict with the law, but they called him "Momma" everywhere he went. And, he was a very loving person, who, when he was around, I really felt good about myself as a --

I think even at 5 I knew I was two-spirited, and a lesbian, and so this was pretty common and it was okay.

But, there were very bad moments, too, when people would prey on us. The Downtown Eastside was full of predators. And, men would come into our room, and I would use my body to protect my sister. Liz wasn't living with us at the time yet, she would come later. And, I would tell them to fuck off. I was not a tough kid. I was 5 or 6 years old, but I could -- if I had to protect my sister, I could be very fierce, even at that age. I couldn't really protect myself, I don't know why, but for her I could move mountains.

One day, my brother and I were on the docks at Campbell Avenue. We would take off, and I knew the Downtown Eastside really good, I knew every alley and everything -- there was a lot of violence in the projects. It was, kind of, normal, you know, for family violence. A lot of our friends had similar circumstances. But, we were sitting down at the docks, we had free reign to do whatever we wanted, we were unsupervised and didn't have a lot of guidance. And, every now and then, if you looked at my school record, you would see how atrocious it was. I wouldn't really go to school if I didn't want to. I would go off and find my granny, and try to tell her it was Pro-D day or something, what they call Pro-D day now, and she

would say, "Are you sure?" And, she would send me back to school.

But, anyway, I don't know if we had skipped out or if it was the weekend, but we were sitting on the dock and we saw one of our uncles -- it was one of my mom's cousins, and in our tradition that's like her brother, so we called him uncle. And, he was walking down the docks at Campbell Avenue with these two kids. And, it looked like somebody had put a bowl on their head and just cut the -- I remember saying, "Who are those kids?" And, my brother and I are looking at each other. And, my uncle said, "Well, this is your brother, Trev, and this is your sister, Liz."

And, we didn't even know about them. I didn't even know that they existed. I knew about the three older ones, but I didn't know about these ones. We were like, "You've got to be kidding." So, they came home with us that day, and Liz Anne and I got into a fight, like, within minutes. Our personalities clashed really strongly. And, we really suffered from that very moment on. We had a lot of tension and strain in us. There was a deep love that was just -- I don't know where that came from, but also a very deep -- they weren't like us. They fought with each other, and hit each other, and my mother wouldn't let me and my brothers do that. And, for some reason we had this unspoken understanding that that's not what family

does, but they were like that, these two siblings.

And, I remember them fighting with each other, and her hitting me, and I was like, who are you? Like, I mean, that's not what a sister does. And, I remember my brother, Trev, fighting with my brother, Gav, and pulling out this thing and slicing his ear, and there was blood everywhere. And, we had these, I don't know whether they were care aids or homemakers or whatever, running out the door. Like, "I can't handle these kids". They were pretty wild.

But, Liz was with us, she was about 10, I guess, at the time. 9, going on 10 maybe. And, I remember one night, there was a party downstairs, and those men came again. And, she was sharing the bed with me and Lisa, because it was only like, you know, three rooms, and my brothers were in one and we were in -- the girls were in another, and my mom was in her own. And, the men came, that man came and took her, took Liz Anne. He took her in the bathroom. And, I think she was trying to protect me and Lisa, the way that I tried to protect Lisa. So, Lisa and I got up and we looked under the door of the bathroom, and we could see him raping her.

And, pretty immediately after that, she started running away, and she would run to different friends' places, and she didn't come back. She ended up in

foster care, group homes -- different group homes, because obviously she had a lot of behavioural issues by that point. I mean, her dad had brought her and said, "I can't take these kids. You're going to have to look after them, Jo." That's what my mom -- they call her Jo. "You're going to have to look after them because I've got two of my own", that he had with my mom's cousin. "And, I can't handle them." They were having problems by then. So, that's how they ended up with us.

And, by then, my mom had five kids, and then he dropped two more on her. A single Indigenous woman in the city, I don't know what the hell she was supposed to do. I have a lot of compassion for my mother, because I see her as an Indigenous woman who was just lost and on her own. It was also, at that time, that a lot of Indigenous families were moving to the city because, you know, people were coming for education. You could get off the reserve now; right? You know, you could go and get an education, you could get health care, you could find jobs.

So, there were people coming, and we did have a sense of community -- we had a community, and I knew there were people within it that I felt safe with and we would hang out with. But, by that time, I think the strain was so bad for my mom, and all the violence that she had gone through up to that point, that -- and then I think the

poverty probably crushed her. How are you going to feed seven kids on welfare?

And, eventually, my one brother went to live with an uncle. Liz was in foster care. Trev went into foster care. My youngest brother went to live with a family friend. And, the very youngest brother went to -- my aunt took him right from birth. So, that left me and Lisa, she's there with me there, and I was 7, she was 6. And, I remember we were alone in the -- like, we just got left. I remember seeing my mom, she came to us after school. She said, "Come with me, we're going to go to the corner store" -- now, my mom never gave us candy when she was with us, so it was really weird. And, I kept looking at her thinking something is going on, like she's buying us a bag of candy, she would never do that.

And, I was looking at her saying, "What are you doing, Mom? Where are you going, Mom? What's happening, Mom?" She said, "Oh, I'm just going to the dentist, I have to get my plate fixed", and whatever. And, we were standing there with this bag of candy. And, she said, "Go to the school and just play." And, I don't know that she intended at that moment that she was going to do it, but I remember her walking down Hastings Street, we were on Princess and Hastings, sacred ground for me because it's where I lost a lot.

I remember her walking away, and I was thinking, "I'm not going to see her again." And, Lisa and I went to the school playground, and we played. We went back to the projects, to our place, and it was just her and I there. I don't know how many days it was, because we were used to having days -- my brother and I could cook roasts when we were 6 and 7. We knew how to cook for ourselves and care for ourselves. So, I looked after her and she looked after me, and we had each other.

And then one night, another one of the uncles came and said, "You've got to come with me", and took us to a foster home. And, I remember that first night being so scared, we were holding on to each other in the bed thinking what's going to happen, where are we, what is this place, who are these people? And, it was near Stanley Park. And, we were put in this room and heard somebody coming up the stairs. And, I thought it was going to be like -- we were going to get sexually abused again, like we did before, because that's what that sound is.

So, I remember I grabbed Lisa, and I was holding her tight, and I had her, and I said, "Just pretend you're sleeping, pretend you're sleeping," and we were holding on. And, somebody kept flicking the light off and on, off and on, off and on, like Chinese torture; you know? And, it seemed to last forever. I'm sure it was only a few

minutes. But, eventually they walked away.

Now, Lisa was -- I was more like a wallflower. I was, sort of, like, laying in the weeds, scoping things out, checking people out. I was, kind of, watchful of people and wary of people, because everybody was -- you know, until I knew I could trust you, I wasn't going to trust you. Lisa was a bit more -- I wouldn't show my anger, I wouldn't show my feelings, and I definitely wouldn't show my tears, but she was, like, if she loved you, you knew it. If she hated you, you knew it. Even at that young age. And, she was, sort of, a force to be reckoned with, you know?

And, she clashed with that foster mother. Her name was Rose, a non-Indigenous woman. They fought and battled. And, Rose could be very emotionally and verbally abusive, eventually it turned into physical abuse. We moved back near Commercial Drive, and her and Lisa had a real knockdown, drag-out one day. And, she grabbed Lisa and threw her, and Lisa's head hit the corner of the bed. And, I thought, that's fucking it, I'm taking you out. I'm 8, but I'm going to take you down. And, you can beat the crap out of me, but I'm going to make you hurt. And so, I jumped on her and Lisa jumped on her, and it was both of us taking her down. And, because I was the easier one to handle, they took Lisa and put her in a different foster

home, and they kept me there. So, they separated us.

Now, one of the men that was surrounding that -- this family drank, too. And, I remember going to the sister-in-law's place and her husband was playing with the boys. I was a tomboy, I loved playing physical activities. Anyway, I was staying overnight there. And, for some strange reason they had me sleep with them in their bed. And, they were drinking. And, that man molested me in that bed, with that woman right there. And, he kept saying, "Oh Fifi (ph), oh Fifi", and that was the woman's name, Fifi. And, I was thinking, who the fuck do you think you're tricking? You think that I think you're really sleeping, and you really think I'm Fifi? You know I am 7. You know it.

But, I never told anyone because nothing ever happened if you told anyone. Eventually -- I kept asking to go see my sister, go see my sister. She was living in a foster home in Cloverdale, near Surrey. And, they let me go see her. And, this time, Liz Anne, I don't know how many group homes she had been in by that point, or Trev. But, Lisa, they finally let me see her. I don't know how many months that was after they separated us.

And, I kept running away. That's when I really started to run. I would find my granny and I would tell my granny they don't even eat fish. My granny always

gave me fish. And, she would have to take me back. And, I was like, "Can I live with you, gran?" "No, honey, they won't let you." They thought she was too old, or whatever. So, they would take me back.

And then, eventually, one weekend, they let me go see Lisa, and I remember being so happy, like thinking, wow, she's in the country, there are horses, she gets to ride horses and stuff, you know, maybe this was better for her. By then I'm 8, and she's 7.

That night that man came in the room and I told him to fuck off. And, I turned to her and I said, "Lisa, does he do this?" And, I wasn't there to protect her. And, she said yes. So, when the Children's Aid worker, at that time it was Children's Aid, when she came to pick me up, I said he's doing that to her. I told her what he was doing. And, she said to me, "Are you sure you're not lying, because you want be with your sister?" And, she stayed there and there was nothing I could do.

I tried to tell. It's probably the first time I ever told anyone about the sexual abuse and I couldn't do anything. And then I really ran, and I wasn't going to go back anymore. And, eventually, they let my granny -- they said, "Yes, just take her then. Take her. Take her for the summer." My granny was going home to Alert Bay. We were a fishing family, a fishing community.

My grandfather was a fisherman and my granny was a cook on his boat. My uncle, my mom's brother, was a fisherman.

So, I went to Alert Bay and I was staying with my uncle's family. And, there I found love and acceptance, and a community, and an identity, and my culture, and people who surrounded and supported me. But, it wasn't like that at first. I remember sitting in the back of the truck -- you know, kids were allowed to sit in the back of the trucks then. And, I remember my uncle stopping, and my cousin, Darlene, I didn't know she was my cousin, jumped into the truck, and she landed on my hand and I was ready to go. You know, I come from the city and this background, and I'm thinking everybody is a predator or, you know, a hustler, and wanted something from me.

Anyway, she says, "Hey, how are you? Who are you?" And, we figured out that we were cousins. And, I learned to trust some people. But, I always longed for my sister. And, I always wondered where Liz was, and Trev. I wondered how Gav was. My siblings, I wondered how my brother, Chris, was, who's the FASD. And, I wondered how my brother, Hadden (ph), was. He was the youngest. And, the only other fair one. The rest look like our mom. I mean, me, Lisa and Hadden look like our dad.

But, I remember Chris, the family he was living with, they were also from -- in Alert Bay, even

though the communities were amalgamated, you know, and they were living on the one part where they had some of the people from the other villages had been dislocated *[sic]* in there. So, I got to see him. And, I would buy him clothes and go get him at lunch. I was in grade 8, which was about 13. He was about 8. And, my friends would fawn over him, because he has these beautiful long eye lashes, and he is really small because of the FASD, and he has, like, all the -- he's just cute; right? So, I got to see him and be reunited with him for a while. My dad came one day. He was a fisherman, so he came into port, and I would see him on occasion. And, he was saying, "I'm going to take Chris back with me, mom and I are together." They had reunited. Anyway, he said, "One day, you know, you and Lisa maybe will come home."

And, that's eventually what happened. Somehow, Lisa and her group homes ended up back home, but by then she had been so damaged and wounded, by the time I was reunited with her, she had been exposed to the streets at 11, introduced to heroine, and was a prostitute at 12. And then Liz, also when I finally was reunited with her, it was the same story. Through their journey through the system, not having benefit of family, and connections, and culture, and identity, they found -- well, people found them and exploited them. And, that became their life,

addictions and prostitution.

Now, I would beg Lisa not to go out on the streets. I, eventually -- every child wants to be returned to their mother. So, even though my uncle was loving, his wife was a bit resentful to have another kid to look after, but we had our differences, and then we ended up having a grudging respect for one another. But, I credit her with my knowledge of our culture and our traditions, because her family is very traditional and they included me in all of that, the recovery of the traditions, the potlatch, the language and what have you. So, I was lucky to be part of that reinvigoration of the culture and all that.

There was a big house was built in Alert Bay and the tallest totem pole was built. And, people were fighting and active for protecting the fish, and the roads, and the logging and, you know, for education. One of my cousins had died of -- for health care. She had died of a burst appendicitis. And, it really was the catalyst for our community to become very active in seeking health care. So, it was political times. AIM was happening. There was this movement of Indigenous people. And, I got to witness a lot of that and observe it and, even though I was a child, be part of it.

My sisters didn't have that. So, by the time that I met them, all they knew was the sexual abuse,

and exploitation, and addiction. And, Liz and I would have contact off and on. She became pregnant with her eldest son. And, I think for a period of time in that relationship she had found some stability. I think she wanted a different life. And, she had her son, her eldest, and she immediately, one year to the day, had her second son. But, that relationship she was in was violent with this non-Indigenous man. And, eventually, she left him and they moved to the Sunshine Coast. She moved there with her kids, and she ended up there with this other man, this other non-Indigenous man. And, I remember going to visit her a few times and she seemed to have a pretty stable life. Even though she was still shoplifting -- I mean, she couldn't get that out of her system. There were certain aspects of her life -- and it seemed like she was drinking, but not drugging. And, it was like, okay, I guess she's somewhat stable. The kids seem to be okay.

It wasn't until years later that I learned that that relationship broke down, when I was writing the Gladue Report for Liz's son, that he had been sexually abused, as had his younger brother. And, he ended up in a forensic psychiatric facility for children after she left them, repeating the mistakes of our mother. The intergenerational trauma, he carried the burden of that and the weight of that, and himself has been now in and out of

the criminal justice system since he was probably 11.

And, she went back to life on the streets and became very deep into her addictions. And, I remember seeing her sometimes on the streets. And, my grandmother told me it's our law that we never walk past our people, our relatives, but there were times I would see her from afar and I couldn't approach her. I feel ashamed of that. But, there was a time when she came and she said, "Halie, I need your help. I know I need to change and I need to get free of this, and I need a place to stay." And, I said, "Okay, Liz Anne." This is around the time that she -- I said, "I only have three rules, and that is that you don't do drugs, don't bring that into my life; you don't lie to me; and you don't steal from me. Those are my rules." She said okay.

She came to stay with me. That lasted about a week. She did drugs in my house. She tried to do drugs with our younger brother, I found out, in my house. And, she lied to me. And, she stole from me. And, I told her, "You know what, I've chosen a different path. I can't live that life. I can't bear witness to it. Like, you cannot be part of my life if you're going to be like that. You're going to have to leave." So, I send her away and she went back onto the streets. She said, "I understand, sis. I understand."

The next time I saw her was on a bus. I was going to work. By this time, I was working at the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. I was the Executive Director there. I was working on all sorts of issues, child welfare issues, joint policy council with the Ministry and whatnot, trying to figure things out; education issues for Indigenous children and stuff. And, I saw her on the bus. And, she said, "Hey, sis." I said, "Hey, Liz Anne." And, I could see that she was tripping. And, I said, "What are you doing?" She was very loud. And, she said, "Ah, I'm just going from one doctor to another, you know? I'm on the methadone program, but I'm trying to get this other stuff." And, I was like, "Well, have you talked to your sons?" And, she was like, "No. No, I haven't." I said that intentionally to hurt her, because I wanted her to know that her kids were pretty messed up by what happened.

But, anyway, we parted ways, and that was the last time I actually physically saw her. But, she would phone our mother -- she stayed in contact with our mother through all of the years. She would phone her on Mother's Day and she would phone her on Christmas. And, if she was in Vancouver, she would see her. And, eventually, we learned that she had moved to Toronto. I don't know what inspired her, what the circumstances were for that, but she ended up in Toronto living with some guy named Tim

or Tom.

And, she phoned me one night. And, by this time, her son had gone through about -- I think he was in 13 or 14 foster homes, and his one-on-one worker had found him at the Union of Chiefs. And so, I met him, her eldest son. And, I became part of his life. And, I would attend -- I was amazed and struck by -- they had a meeting of all the people that were involved in his life, like the current and past foster parents were there, and all the one-to-one workers, this social worker, that worker, this counsellor, that counsellor. And, I was looking at this whole table of people that were involved in this boy's life. By this time, he's 15. And, I was the only family member there. And, I was like, holy smokes, this is who he has. And, I was really struck by that, that this is the life that he has lived, which was the life that his mother lived. And, there was no point of context. There were so many different opportunities for that not to happen, but it happened again, and again, and again.

Anyway, through that connection, he wanted to be connected with his mom, and we were able to -- I said, "You know, I really don't know that that's a good idea. Your mom is still struggling." He said, "But, I want to see her." I said, "You know, it's entirely up to you, but it's not something I would -- I would think about

that before I did it." You know, because it could be pretty painful, knowing from my own experience with my own mother, being reunited with her and still using -- still drinking, how difficult that was.

And, eventually, he went to Toronto to see her. And, she was on methadone, but she was stockpiling methadone and mixing it with other drugs. And, she had had a few scares. And, he came back really -- he phoned me from Toronto and he says, "I've got to get the hell out of here. You've got to get me out of here. She's looking after some kid who is not her kid, with this guy, and this is what she is doing." And, he was pretty angry. So, I said, "Well, I'm not sending you money because you've got issues too. I'll buy you a ticket and you better not cash it in." And, he made his way back to Vancouver.

And, he got into trouble with the law again, and was in jail, and somehow, he phoned his mother in Toronto. And then this was probably the last independent conversation I ever had with her. She phoned and she said, "Hale, Ron is in the slammer and we've got to spring him." And, I said, "Liz, don't give me that gangster talk. We're not those people, you know? Just tell me properly what's going on." And, she told me, and I said, "Okay, I will get a hold of his lawyer", and whatever and -- I've already been that person in the family that you go to when there's

a problem. So, that's the last conversation I had. And, I said, "And, don't talk to me like that again. I don't like that. It reminds me of the stuff I don't want to deal with."

And, he eventually ended up in a car accident that took his leg. It didn't take his leg off, he had to go through extensive rehab. Anyway, when he was around this time, he wanted to meet more of the family because he hadn't -- at this point he had only known me, remembered me.

So, I took him to meet my mom, his grandma. And, he fell in with, almost immediately, the drug users, and sellers, and everything. And, somehow set up some sort of thing to transport drugs up -- whatever. But, during that visit, before all that happened, and he got booted back to Vancouver, Liz phoned. It was Christmas. His mom phoned. And, we were talking with her on the phone. And, by that time, she had OD'd and she had significant cognitive impairments and physical impairments, and speech, and whatnot. She didn't remember who I was. She didn't know who Ron was, her own son. But, for some reason, she remembered our mother. And, the man she was with, Tim or Tom, or whatever, got him to phone her mom.

And, I tried talking to her and saying, it's me, it's Halie, your sister. And, she had no clue who I

was because of whatever happened, like the stroke or whatever happened, the drug-induced cognitive brain damage. And then my mom talked to the man she was with. And, he said, yes, she's in a wheelchair. She goes for rehabilitation. She can't walk. She can't really talk. She really has very little memory, but she remembered you and wanted me to phone and talk to you, to my mom. And then that was Christmas. And, that was it. I think my mom said that she heard from her on Mother's Day that year, and then that was it, nobody has ever heard from her since.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Sorry. Was she ever reported missing?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: My mother would not report it. It was years later that I finally did. And, a lot of that is because of the distrust that my mom has for people in authority. There was a time, when I was a kid, that my mom, who is an epileptic, she was in the lobby of the Balmoral Hotel, and she went into an epileptic seizure, and the desk clerk came from behind and started kicking her face in. And, my mom has a reconstructed side of her face. You can feel the wires and everything in there.

And, witnesses at the time who finally stopped this guy, he was saying, "Fucking Indian. Get the fuck out of here. That's all you fucking Indians do." He was kicking her face in. And, my mom said that, you know,

she woke up in the hospital, had to have this reconstructive surgery, and nothing ever happened to the guy. He was never charged.

And, she had various other experiences she told me about. There were really bad cops who would abuse Indian women in the Downtown Eastside. I later came to learn that that was also true -- we were working on the Frank Paul inquiry, and our (indiscernible) was interviewing people in the Downtown Eastside, and there was a circle of women at the Aboriginal Front Door. They disclosed similar stories to what my mom had the generation before, that they were experiencing the same things.

So, my mom wouldn't call the police. That wasn't going to happen. There is so much distrust of authority.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, when you finally did, what was the response of the authorities?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: Well, I finally did. You know, my mom was crying, and fretting about this, and wondering where she was, and she's getting older. And, I thought, oh, I'm going to have to do this. And, at one point, when I was in law school, we had the (indiscernible) went to Toronto, and I was part of the UBC law team. And, I made some efforts, but not a lot, I have to admit -- you know, I didn't even know where to begin because -- I don't

know. I'm an educated woman. I'm an advocate. I feel powerful, but I'm powerless when it comes to this.

And, if I feel that way, I can understand how my mother must feel, who is not educated, by no means is she -- like, she doesn't have any cognitive impairments or anything like that, but emotional and life experiences have beat her down. And, she's a bit -- you know, got a bit of a hard crust, but she's actually just a very vulnerable woman. So, if I could feel that way, I can imagine how she felt.

It wasn't until about 2013, so about 14 years later, that I -- and my mom was becoming desperate. And, by this time my brother, Trev, Liz's brother from that father, he was also starting to worry about her, wonder about her, and he started to confide in me that he periodically would try to search for her. And, I thought, okay, well, I guess it's down to me. I guess I'm going to have to do this.

And, I live in the Valley. So, I phoned the Toronto Police. And, also at this time, my mother had an address for Liz, her last known address on Jane Street in Toronto. That's all we knew. And, a phone number, which she had tried to phone and she had tried to write numerous times with no response. And, she lost that number, but she had also given it to my eldest sister, who had lost it and

misplaced it. And, for years they had been looking -- my mom is a bit of a pack rat. Like, my granny, there's always a purpose for the things. Like, they're keeping it because they're going to potlatch it, or if somebody needs something, they're going to give it. That's our way; right? You know, it looks like hoarding, but it's actually, kind of, by design. By this time, my mom has been sober for about -- probably about 20 years. And so, I phoned and they said, well, you have to phone your local detachment and they'll have to contact us. And, I said okay.

So, I phoned the RCMP in Chilliwack and told them I wanted to make this missing person's report. And, I didn't hear from anyone at first, but then one day we were out shopping with our daughters and the Constable phoned me back. And so, we took our daughters into the store, and I sat in the parking lot. And, the venom that came from that man. The absolute contempt saying, "Why didn't your mother report it? What do you expect us to do after 14 years?" And, I said, "Excuse me? You know, this is 2013. Surely you've heard about the missing Indigenous women. Surely you know that there's a lot of people who are missing, who have gone unreported."

And, he was just so dismissive. His reply was, well, we can get them to do a safety check at that

address but, you know, that's about all we can do. And, I was absolutely stunned. And, I couldn't believe how powerless I felt, and I'm a lawyer. I'm a lawyer. I'm educated. I speak to huge conferences of people about child protection, about Gladue, about prisoner's rights, about Aboriginal offenders, about the structural racism and systemic racism that our people have suffered, and the laws, and policies, and practices that have impacted our people over multiple generations. Not just the residential school, but denying women of their rights, and their identity, and their status, and their children. You know, denying women and children, Indigenous children, the benefit and right of their culture, by taking them into the child protection system. I talk about this stuff. I do workshops. I facilitate. And, I can't talk about this.

And, I couldn't even get an RCMP officer to listen to me with any dignity and pride. And, I understood even more profoundly the racism that my mother experienced throughout her life, from the 50s to now, to today. So, how would she ever expect to get any help finding my sister when I couldn't do it?

So, that's why I made the application to come here, to tell this story. And, it begins with my mom. It begins before my mom. And, I remember writing to my mother one time and telling her, you know, I'm a functional

alcoholic. I'm sober now. I hit 30 and I thought, holy crap, you know, I've lived through all of this stuff. I have lived through sexual abuse. I have lived through the pain and loss. I've borne witness to the racism and discrimination of my people. I better smarten up, you know? I've got to find a purpose for this. I have to find a reason for this pain.

So, I went to law school, you know, and I'm a mediator, and now I'm a part-time member of the Parole Board of Canada. And, I choose to call it -- people want to call it resilience, and I say no, it's resistance. The difference between me and my sisters is that I have benefit of my people, and those connections to the land, and the culture, our teachings, and our traditions. I can say I am (speaking in Kwak'wala language). They could not say that.

All they were was words that I remember as a kid. Red meat. They were red meat for the predators. How could they not look at them, and see them at 11 and 12, and not see that they were raping children? How could they not see us at 5, and 6, and 7, and not see that we were children?

And, today I have daughters who are the ages Lisa and I were when we went into care. And, last night was a very dark night for me, because I have a lot of -- what I said to one of my biological family, my sister who

had (indiscernible) is around me, the women -- the circle of women who provided me with support every day, including my wife, that I have a well of tears and silence, and I try not to look at it too long because I'm afraid I'm going to drown.

And, that's me as a powerful woman, you know? I'm powerful and I know that. I choose to look at the lives of my daughters and see that we can change that for the future. And, I dedicate my work to that. That's why I write Gladue Reports for Aboriginal offenders. That's why I write -- you know, got into child protection. That's why I facilitate workshops about how you can take a look at that legislation as Indigenous communities, and you can intervene in the lives of your children, of our Indigenous children, so that they're not taking into a system.

And, to complete Lisa's story, what happened by the time I returned was she was so street involved -- I remember one of the last pictures I had with her, we were at a party -- I had my own struggles with alcohol. I've OD'd. I came back. But, I would never get as street involved as her and Liz were. For some reason, I just would not.

And, I believe that was my culture and the traditions, and my memory of my grandmother telling me,

"You are Kwanxwa'logwa. That's who you are no matter where you go in the world, no matter what you look like, or what anybody says about you, that's who you are. Remember that wherever you are." And, they never got to hear that message from our grandmother, ever.

They never got to stand in our big house and hear their lineage, that they were Tlingit and (speaking in Kwak'wala language). They came from noble families, that they were noble women, that this was not our tradition. They never had benefit of that.

And, the last picture I have of my sister, we were at a party. I was drinking at the time. I admit it. I had my struggles trying to adjust back to the city, and bearing witness to the pain that she was suffering. I would just beg her not to go down to Chinatown where she worked the streets. And, you could see her pupils are completely dilated. She is starting to get the acne that you get when you are drug addicted. And, she's holding a drink, and there's bandages, and underneath those bandages are all the slashes that she put on her body, to feel anything, even the pain of her existence.

And, when she died, my God, it crushed me. I went into a downward spiral and I OD'd. And, I came back from it thinking, I can't allow this to happen. There has got to be something we can do. Someone some day has got to

listen.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: How old was she when she died?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: She had just turned 15. By then she had been street involved since she was 11. And, I came to realize later -- there's a lot of things that came to me, over the years, as I reflect upon our lives. For my sisters, I don't mourn their death, I mourn their life. There are so many times that there were opportunities to help them. When Lisa died, there was a write-up in the paper, "Yes, we knew her." The police knew her. The child welfare knew her. The hospitals knew her. The courts knew her. Everybody knew her. So many opportunities to help. So many lost opportunities to give her all she needed.

When I do work on the child protection, when we're teaching how Indigenous communities can become involved that today, what I tell them -- what we've learned from some of the people that we've worked with is that it's not programs that are going to save our lives, it's our relationships. It's our identity and our connections to our communities. And, until we have that, we're only going to continue to repeat the mistakes and we're going to continue to fail Indigenous children. We will end up with Liz Anne's and we will end up with Lisa's.

And, by God -- I know that Dr. Shelly Johnson says there's 5 percent of kids -- about 5 percent who go through the child protection system will get a post-secondary education. And, by God, I am one of them and I am proud of that, but it's come at a great, great loss.

So, what I call it is "post-traumatic growth", not post-traumatic stress. I look at it, and it's traumatic, and it's painful, and I have to go through it, but if I don't, then I'll just be crushed by it. So, I find a purpose for this pain and I try to direct my energies in that.

So, we've worked on a guide book. I devote part of my practice to child protection and worked on a guide book about wrapping our ways around them, inspired by Ardith's work with her in (speaking in Kwak'wala language) community about the provisions within the *Child and Family Services Act*, where Indigenous peoples can become involved to intervene on behalf of their child members. Even if the parents are broken, you have a responsibility to those children. They have a right, a human right, to be connected to you. And, you have to reply, you have to respond. And, this is how you can do it.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, Commissioner Eyolfson, the witness would like to produce two documents to share with the Commission. One is a binder resulting in the work

of Halie, and the second one is a document resulting in the work of Halie as well. So, we will deposit these documents under Exhibit 1, for the binder, Exhibit 2, for the document. Thank you.

MS. HALIE BRUCE: Actually, my wife led the work and the writing of that, and I am very honoured and privileged to be part of the research and writing team, and teaching it, and facilitating it. And, what it does, is it explores those provisions within the existing *Child and Family Services Act*. Not saying that we're not fighting for our jurisdiction and that we have a right to exercise that jurisdiction within the area of child welfare, Indigenous child welfare, but saying that there are provisions and promises within the Act that allow for Indigenous communities to intervene on behalf of their child members, and this is the way you can do it, because a lot of our communities don't know how.

So, we wrote and produced this guide book, which has been, I'm happy to say, even taught to judges. And, we understand that there is work underway right now to revise and amend the legislation to reflect some of this work. So, it's been used, sort of, as a bench book, and a guide book, to Indigenous communities, educating members of the bar. But, it's primarily targeted to our Indigenous communities about how you can intervene in practical steps,

to take a foothold within that legislation, and then expand ourselves until one day we do have that jurisdiction and that ability to protect our children. And, I have to tell you that when that started, it was about 51 or 52 percent of children in British Columbia taken into care were Indigenous. Today it has only grown. It is over 60 percent.

And, in my other work that I've done, I have written over a hundred Gladue Reports for Aboriginal offenders. Sadly, too few for women. I don't know why when we're actually over incarcerated, and over charged, and get longer sentences, and are imprisoned for a lot longer than even Indigenous men. But, in that work, I have to tell you, I would estimate about -- at least 90 to 95 percent of the offenders I have worked with have gone through that system. They have been disconnected in a radical way from their cultures and their traditions, and that's how this happens. Because we don't know that violence is not our tradition.

Honouring women is our tradition. And, our laws, we don't know those laws. And, in that work with the Gladue, I have to tell you I hear all the different points. The structural racism, Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine are only the most recent. There are hundreds and thousands of Aboriginal offenders who are currently incarcerated, who

have gone through and have been crushed by that same system. And, they graduate from the child welfare system into the criminal justice system, it's a path. It's so clear. It's unbelievably clear.

And, if anyone were every to undertake a study of all the Gladue Reports, I'm sure that they would find the same pattern that I have in my work. And, the work with Indigenous women offenders, it's a history so repeated of my sisters' lives, the lives that I mourn. Not so much the death, the lives that they lived. They have lived it, hundreds and thousands of them, and they are still living it. And, there will be more, if we don't do something.

And so, I write and devote part of my practice to writing Gladue Reports. Not because I practice criminal law, because I don't. I do it because somebody has to tell the story. Somebody, like what you guys are doing here, has to hear these stories. It's a burden, and it's a gift, and it's a sacred responsibility, to use our knowledge and our power to be able to educate other people about the systemic racism that happens, that leads an offender to be before the court, so that they can see them within the context of their lives and understand that healing is not going to happen in the prisons. It's going to happen when we look at those laws, and those policies

and practices, and the impacts of those, and then find pathways of healing. And, it's not impossible, but it is if we continue to turn a blind eye to it.

In my other work, in my personal life, what we have done is we have used art as another form. I have participated in various art projects. The most recent one is one called Testify, which is an exhibit put on by the Indigenous Laws and the Arts Collective, that pairs lawyers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous legal thinkers, with artists, to explore areas of Indigenous laws.

And, there was a call for submissions to this project, to this collective. One of the things I wanted to do was to challenge this notion that I came across in law school called *Racine v. Woods,* where the judge in that case decided in favour of a non-Aboriginal foster parent that, in the words of the court, culture abates over time. Bonding doesn't matter. Culture abates over time. *Racine v. Woods*.

There is a recent story of Leticia Racine, who is now running a healing circle, who is the child involved in that case and now is a woman, who was part of the Sixties Scoop class action suit. And, those children are not suing because they were taken necessarily from difficult circumstances, they are suing because they were denied their identity, and their culture, and the benefit

of our culture, as I benefited from and that my sisters did not.

But, in *Racine v. Woods*, there is this thread, this thought within the judiciary that culture abates over time. It's not important. It doesn't matter if this is an Indigenous baby. We have seen care plans for children, Indigenous children taken right from the hospital, right from their mothers, saying we don't need a preservation plan because they're too young. And, we know that culture starts in the belly. We know that. That's where it starts, that language, that talking.

So, I wanted to challenge that notion that I learned in Western law. I thought that is totally crazy. How could anyone in their right mind think that? And, I wanted to explore the areas of Indigenous law that I knew, to stand up against that, to say no, that's not the way it is, that's not how laws are, our Indigenous laws.

And, I got paired with a wonderful artist named Nadya Kwandibens, who is a videographer and photographer. She's got Red Works Designs. And so, her and I collaborated -- we were paired. There was, like, 11 other pairs. And, they were exploring different areas of the law, whether it's environmental land issues, relationship, identity. And, her and I were exploring Indigenous child welfare.

Now, as it turns out, Nadya and I have presented on this, as part of the exhibit, numerous times. She came up with a video triptych that documents both of our shared experience, because she herself was in the child welfare system in Ontario. And, when she was 15, she took the province of Ontario to court to emancipate herself, to free herself from their involvement in her life.

So, she did the triptych and I wrote the piece. And, that's the production of the pairings that are a part of this thing called Testify, the show. And, in it, I talk about the laws that my grandmother taught me, because they're not written down. They're about the way that we are in relation to each other, and how she would look after people, and taught me our -- our people, (speaking in Kwak'wala language). You're the reason I breathe. When I say, (speaking in Kwak'wala language), it's because you take my breath with you, that we're connected. Those are the laws I was taught. That's how it's represented, not written on a paper.

So, Nadya and I, in our collaboration, I wrote that piece, and she has a video triptych that documents in its way -- we would have brought it actually, if I had thought of it, but -- the experience of an Indigenous child going into care, when the world you remember, you had your grandmothers, you had your people,

you had your traditions, you had your knowledge of who you were, and then you are taken from that, and your world becomes devoid of culture, devoid of colour, confusing, scared. And then the next triptych, it documents that experience, that you're struggling to remember. There is no colour in it. Every now and then there's little spots of colour where you remember who you are. And then the third one is when you return to culture, and the strength and power of that.

So, that's our work. If you ever get a chance to see it, it's going to be at the Chippawa (indiscernible) in May. And then we're going to wrap up at the University of Victoria next year, when they launch the joint Indigenous laws and Western law degree. So, we've done that.

And, we've also documented quite a number of work together, with Ardith and I, and Nadya. We did Indigenous Legal Divas photo shoot, which kind of went viral. All of this is trying to find ways to show that we can grow from those experiences, and we can try to change it and document the experiences that are happening. So, what we did was ten Indigenous women lawyers got together, and we took over the old courtroom in downtown Vancouver, and we did a photo shoot, some of us in regalia, some of us not. The baby on the front of that, that was taken that

day, that's our daughter. And, those are the ten circle of women that were in that photo shoot, holding her.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: If you'd allow me, Commissioner Eyolfson, this is the photo shoot that Halie is talking about.

MS. HALIE BRUCE: This one is the picture that was taken outside of the court room. What we did was we marched from -- we took our stuff and we went down into the back alley of the Downtown Eastside to reclaim our space and recognize the women who were lost there and are missing from there.

The woman in the very front there, Elizabeth Hunt, was the lawyer who was involved in the Oppal inquiry on the missing women. That represents us standing with her, trying to stand with her in the name of the Indigenous women who are missing and murdered.

So, all of this to say Lisa died at 15. She was in foster care. She had overdosed, was exposed to the elements -- it was Christmas time. And, she got double pneumonia and died actually, if you look at the coroner's report, of a heart attack, or heart failure from pneumonia, at 15. At the same time, my sister-in-law's sister died. She was -- they ruled it an accidental -- she fell out of a window on the Downtown Eastside. None of us believe that. She was also street involved and addicted.

But, at the time, there was a coroners' strike that was going to happen in Vancouver. We got Lisa's body, and we were able to cremate her and put her to rest. But, my sister-in-law was not able to do that because the strike happened and her sister's body was in the morgue for the whole time of that strike and her family was deeply impacted by that. And, I invited them to apply to this, but they can't. There are so many voices you are not hearing.

So, she died under those circumstances. There are other women that I have come across in my professional and personal life. When I worked at the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, I used to go out -- we worked in Gastown, and I would go by the railroad tracks and I would smoke, because there was a little group of Indigenous people that hung out there.

One of them was this Anishinaabe woman named Marie, and she would always try to hustle me for money, and I'd say, "No, Marie, you know I'm not going to give you money because you're just going to get that cooking wine. And, I'm not going to do that, but I'll give you a smoke." And, we would sit there and talk. And, I would hear her story about how she was disconnected from her family, and the shame she felt that she could not return because she had done too much she was ashamed of.

There was another woman, Virginia. She was a deaf woman who didn't go to residential school, but ended up at the School for the Blind and Deaf here at Jericho Hill. Similar abuses happened to her. I did not know that until I met -- we would take leftover foods from meetings, and various things we went to, and go through the parks and give them to these people. And, that's where I met Virginia and her companion, Ashley. And, slowly I heard her story -- a little bit of her story.

Years later, just last summer, I was given a Gladue Report for a woman. It turned out to be -- through the interview process I discovered it was, like, "Hey, wait a minute, did your mom live in a park by the Jericho Hill School?" And, she said, "Oh, my God, you knew my mom?" And, it was just like I met this woman's daughter, as it turns out, and documented for her the abuses that she suffered and how she ended up on the streets. There are so many women with so many experiences that are not here. And, there is nobody to give voice to that.

Oh yes, that's the picture. That's my cousin, Elizabeth, who is the lawyer that was involved in the Oppal inquiry, and myself. And, some of the -- you see Pamela Shields. She started the Gladue Project for the legal services society at the time and really kicked that off, so that we could provide documentation for the courts

about the lives of Indigenous offenders. And, some of the other women that you see there are all Indigenous lawyers who work in different aspects of the law, in an alley in the Downtown Eastside. It was a pretty powerful day.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, Halie, why do you think you have taken a different path than your sisters?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: I think it was the resistance that I had to what was being forced upon me in foster care. And, even though I was 8 and 9, I would resist and I would run, and I would find my granny. I remember I would be -- anywhere you put me in the city, I would look to the mountains and I would say, there is Frost Mountain, that means granny is right there and I would find her. I would always find my granny.

And then being returned to our village -- being taken to our village, and being raised within that culture and system that was just being revived, coming back, and being taught all of these -- who I was. And, one of the teachers, one of the most profound teachers I had was Gloria Cranmer, who recently got the Order of Canada. And, she was responsible for starting the U'Mista Cultural Centre, which has the language program, and all sorts of different things, and the repatriation of the potlatch collection of -- we call it the potlatch collection. It was the regalia and masks that were taken when her father

and other chiefs were arrested for practicing the potlatch.

And, she says something very profound in Box of Treasures. U'Mista means something to be returned, like something taken and returned, like a treasure. But, in the video, Box of Treasures, and A Strict Law Bids Us Dance, she says that we don't know what's going to happen to these kids, you know, there's a lot of competing things for their attention. But, what we do know is, if they know who they are, they'll be better for it. And, she was right.

And, when I graduated law school, she was there with me. She came -- and all the way through law school, through all my self-doubt, through all of -- like, "I think I'm a fraud. I come from this, nobody is ever going to believe me." She would say, "Don't ever give up. Remember who you are." And, those were some of the teachings that I got, the culture and the identity that they didn't get, and that so many women have been denied through multiple generations of disconnection and loss. And, I think that's why I'm here.

Part of it is to tell this story that I -- a lot of what I've shared I've not spoken out loud before. It's too painful. And, I thank you guys for the work that you're doing, because I know it's very traumatic for you guys to carry that with you. And, as a Gladue Report writer, I know the gift that that is, and how that can

weigh on you, and the vicarious trauma that can happen from it. So, I really hold up my hands to all of you for the work that you're doing, and I pray for you, for your health, and your healing, too.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you, Halie. So, as a conclusion, I believe you wanted to donate pictures to the Commissioner?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: Yes.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, if you could identify this one as Exhibit 3?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: That’s a picture of my sister, Elisabeth Anne Hill, who no one has heard from since about 1999. She has two sons. One of whom was adopted out and I know is quite successful, but has no connection at all to our family. We just follow him from afar. The other is ---

MS. FANNY WYLDE: This one ---

MS. HALIE BRUCE: --- himself.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: --- would be Exhibit 4.

MS. HALIE BRUCE: And, this is my sister, Lisa Ann Bruce, who died at 15 in the child welfare system. And, that is a picture of both of us, I believe.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: And, the last one would be Exhibit 5.

MS. HALIE BRUCE: This was the last picture.

This is myself on the left, and my sister, Lisa, just before she became a prostitute. This is what she looked like. She was a child. This is the child they took and put on the streets. And, this was our last visit before that happened.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you so much, Halie. Thank you for your inspiring journey. I will now -- Commissioner Eyolfson, if you have any questions or comments?

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Halie, thank you so much for sharing these truths with us, telling us about your family, about growing up, about your sisters, but also for sharing your views on the systemic patterns or links as well, for giving us that -- offering us that insight. I am wondering if I can just ask you a few follow up questions, if you don't mind?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: Absolutely.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Of course, you know, at the end of the day, the Inquiry has to make recommendations to government. And, you've touched on a lot of different things, like the impact of the child welfare system, and the importance of knowing one's identity and culture, and traditions, but if you were to make recommendations to government, you know, to improve the situation, the safety of Indigenous women and girls,

and trans and two-spirit people in Canada, do you have any suggestions as to ---

MS. HALIE BRUCE: I have a lot.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Do you care to share any?

MS. HALIE BRUCE: I have a lot of them. You will find some of it in that binder, in the guide book. There's a lot of different ways that I believe that the child protection system should and could be changed, including -- everybody knows about child development, that the earlier you intervene in a child's life, then the better their chances are of a successful future. And, I think if you take a look at the guide book, you will find that there are a number of things to draw from, including the involvement of an Indigenous child's community, to find those reconnections or to establish connections, sometimes, for the very first time.

One of the recent Gladue Reports I did was for a young woman who was a Kwa'kwa'kawakw woman who had been two generations removed from the child welfare system, and she was pregnant, and she was going up for sentencing and she was fearful that her child would be taken. I think the power of what we have in the -- if that guide book does anything, it's to stress this point, that those relationships are what are going to save our people. And,

when I finished writing her Gladue Report, I put my book aside and I said, "I have a responsibility to you as a Kwa'kwa'kawakw woman carrying a member of our nation. You have never heard any of our language. You don't know your people and I'm the first one you're really meeting. And, every day, I want you to say to your baby -- we knew it was a girl -- and tell her, you are my (speaking in Kwak'wala language). And, you never say "goodbye", you never say "see you", you say (speaking in Kwak'wala language), "you take my breath with you." You tell her, "You're my reason for living". And, you remember that. And, that young woman broke down crying because she had not heard our language. It takes one word. They know it in their heart, in their spirit, what they've been missing. I believe that -- I know that she is doing really well right now, so I'm going to keep praying for her.

But, those recommendations, I think that is what they illustrate in there, is the ways that those relationships can be -- reconnections can happen or connections for the first time over multiple generations can happen. That those systems need to be changed. That child protection system really has to be changed if we're hitting 60 percent of Indigenous children in care in B.C.

In my work with Gladue Aboriginal offenders, I can tell you there are not enough resources whatsoever,

especially for Indigenous women. There are programs, but there is not healing. There is no real healing lodge. There is really no place for them to go. In the Downtown Eastside, where you have this concentration of poverty, and you have addictions, and you have some of the worst abuses happening down there, you know, to send them around the corner to get help -- they need support. They need someone to actually physically -- I'm not kidding, physically, take them one block sometimes, or they are lost within that block. Somebody will approach them. Somebody will take them off their path. They need our Elders, and our aunties, and our women, and our people to be there for them.

I could tell you that within the criminal justice system, within the treatment programs and other things that are offered, they're not always culturally relevant. There are too few culturally relevant services and places for our women, and for our youth. And, they need to be culturally specific. I'm a (speaking in Kwak'wala language) woman. I'm Kwa'kwa'kawakw. That's my culture, that's my tradition. It was my Kwa'kwa'kawakw granny who saved me. And, it was my Kwa'kwa'kawakw laws that inoculated me and helped me through that system. And so, it has to be culturally specific.

I'm not saying that -- you know, that those

that exist are not relevant. They are. Like I say, Auntie Alice is the one who rounded all of us kids up, and we were from all different Indigenous nations, and took us to the Friendship Centre. It was an integral part of our lives as Indigenous children in the projects. But, what I am saying is that I know who I am, my identity is tied to my people, and to the land. I know the story about -- our origin story and our relationship to our river. Our river is our grandfather. We need those stories. They live in our stories.

And, I would say what government has to do is to be able to provide -- it's a challenge. You can't look at it as it can't be done. You have to just say it's a challenge. Just like every day is a challenge. It's like, "How can we do it?" Not saying, "We can't do that. We don't have the money for it." We have people that are there to help.

I would say that there's a huge population of Indigenous youth who have aged out of care, who need that very thing, who need to be connected with their communities. One of my very first Legal Aid clients was a young woman whose fifth child had been taken into care and she was fighting for that, to have her child brought back to her. And, I have to tell you, she was street involved, she was crack addicted, and she was homeless, and she was

fighting for that child, to stay connected to her child.

What I came to realize on my very first instant was that, for her, it was like a family law case. Except it wasn't the father she was fighting, it was this ever-changing Director. That was her family. That was the only family she knew, because she herself had been in care, and her file -- I mean, I have boxes and boxes of disclosure on this woman. And, we cannot have the Director be the only family that these people know or we will lose them again.

We have stories, in recent times, of young Indigenous women aging out of care and dying within months on the street because they have nobody. We have to find those connections and we have to put in -- we have to look at that as a challenge and an opportunity to correct the wrongs of the past, or we will just keep repeating it. And, I do believe that we do need -- I know that there are Gladue courts that are happening in different places, like Ontario. We need those. We need -- I can't tell you how many times I have read in decisions and other things, reasonings that -- and heard stories about judges saying, "Oh. No, no, no, I don't need to -- you know, I don't really need that -- I know all about it. We have a lot of Indigenous people here. I know all about that." Well, you don't know about that Indigenous person in front of you and

that's what you are required to do by law.

We need to make sure that those stories are before the court in their determinations about what is a fit and appropriate sentence. And, any alternative to jail. So, we need to support that. We need to support those stories being documented and before courts at any time that there is contact with our people.

And, not to use the history of Indigenous people as an aggravating factor against them or the weight of history crushing our people. Just because you were involved in the child welfare system doesn't mean your children have to be, if we have the right supports. But, the information used from all of this history is being used against our people. That's my observation. It has to stop. The judiciary, the bench, the bar, we have to stop looking at our people's history as something to use against them, to justify the continued taking of our children and incarceration of our people. We have to look at those as opportunities of healing. Those stories are opportunities to correct things.

And, that's what I see. Everybody's story is unique as you guys know through your work. And, I think government, the child welfare system, certainly police -- I mean, there has got to be -- we're not safe. We don't feel that they are here to serve and protect us. If an educated

woman like me with an advanced degree is going to feel so powerless -- I'm sure if they saw me in person -- by the way, if you look at me, I don't look Indigenous. If I walked into a police station right now, they would look at me as a non-Indigenous woman and probably hear me. This all happened over the phone. I bet if I said that she was a non-Indigenous woman, they would have taken me more seriously.

So, obviously we need a lot more work in the area of policing. We need to have a way of addressing our issues with the police. In my own community, there are fractured relationships with the RCMP. My sister called them when my nephew was acting up one night, he was intoxicated. Instead of approaching him as a human being deserving of respect, they threw him in the drunk tank. That's not necessary, you know?

So, my recommendation is, really, to take a look at those stories as opportunities to find the healing that needs to happen. Every person is unique. Everything has to be culturally specific for an individual. Like, when I told that young kwa'kwa'kawakw woman, I shared with her our language, Kwakwala, just a couple words, I believe that started her pathway to healing. I hope it helps her maintain it. I hope that that has given her a new direction to go in. It gave me the direction to heal, to

use the pains and traumas as a motivation to help our people.

So, I look at the whole system and every point of contact. From the hospital today, where they're taking children into care, through to the child welfare system, through to the criminal justice system, both the youth and the adult. I look at all of those. There is a clear path. We have to create a new path. And, there are many opportunities to step off the current path that we're on.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Thank you so much for coming and sharing, and for your recommendations. And, thank you for these materials as well, and for providing them to us. Thank you, and Ardith as well, for being here, and for providing us with this work that you've done.

MS. HALIE BRUCE: Thank you for your work.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: And, before we wrap up, as a small sign of -- we have a small gift as a sign of reciprocity for you sharing the gift of your truths with us. Before you go, I'm going to ask if Grandmother Blu will speak to the gift.

ELDER LAUREEN BLU WATERS: So, Halie, and your wife, we'd like to offer you this eagle feather which is from this territory. The matriarchs from this area have

collected these feathers and sent them to the National Inquiry, so that we could honour our witnesses with a gift of reciprocity to show gratitude for your story, for your truth, for your strength. As well as a package of strawberry seeds. Those strawberries being the berry of the women, in the shape of the heart, so that you can plant them and continue your healing for your sisters and your family.

And, it will give you a chance to see that there really is beauty out there, which you have experienced, and it will override the darkness if we put our efforts and our culture into it. So, I raise my hands to you and your family, for sharing your truths here, and we'd like to give you these for your journey.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Commissioner Eyolfson, can we adjourn this session?

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Yes, thank you. Let's adjourn and take a short break. Thanks.

--- Exhibits (code: P01P15P0306)

Exhibit 1: "Wrapping Our Ways Around Them: Aboriginal Communities and the CFCSA Guidebook", by Ardith Walkem, 207-page binder with 9 tabs. (Book ISBN: 978-0-9940652-0-9). Note: Includes 26-page plain language guide. Link to binder:

http://www.nntc.ca/docs/wowat_bc_cfcsa_1.pdf

Exhibit 2: Colour copy of a photograph (8 1/2 x 11).

Exhibit 3: Colour photograph in black matting (8 1/2 x 11).

Exhibit 4: Colour photograph in black matting (8 1/2 x 11).

Exhibit 5: Folder containing 3 digital images displayed during the in-camera testimony of the witness.

--- Upon adjourning at 11:05

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Shirley Chang, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.

Shirley Chang

April 18, 2018