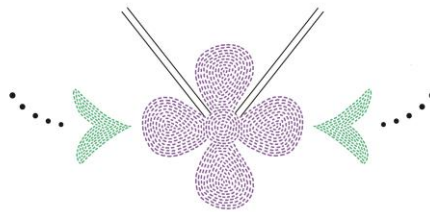


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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
Northwest Community College
Classrooms 122/124 (Public 2)
Smithers, British Columbia**



PUBLIC

Wednesday September 27, 2017

**Public Volume VII:
Rhonda Lee McIsaac;**

**Roddy, Violet and Winnie Sampare,
In relation to Jean Virginia Sampare;**

Rachelle Wilson, In relation to Ramona Wilson

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II

APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations	Julie McGregor (Legal counsel)
Government of British Columbia	Bethany Estiverne (Representative) Taryn Walsh (Representative)
Government of Canada	Anne McConville (Legal counsel) Lucy Bell (Legal counsel) Judith Hoffman (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
Women of Metis Nation / Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak	No Appearance

Note: For the purpose of establishing this record of attendance, counsels are considered present whether they attended one or all of the public hearings held over the course of the day at Northwest Community College - Classrooms 122/124 (Public #2)

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1 Smithers, British Columbia

2 **Hearing # 5**

3 **Witness: Rhonda Lee McIsaac**

4 **Heard by Chief Commissioner Marion Buller**

5 **Commission Counsel: Joseph Murdoch-Flowers**

6 **Clerk: Gladys Wraight, Registrar: Bryan Zandberg**

7 --- Upon commencing on Wednesday, September 27, 2017 at 9:57

8 **MS. RHONDA LEE McISAAC:** (speaking in Native
9 language)

10 My -- I've introduced myself in my
11 Anishinaabe language as has been taught to me by my Elders
12 and my mother and by my teachers at -- in Ontario and
13 across Canada to establish a place and to announce myself
14 to the spirits that may be around and also to establish a
15 connection to this territory. And I acknowledge that I am
16 a visitor here and that I have asked permission to be here
17 and to wear my regalia and to share my truth as I know it
18 and to represent the medicine that is in this dress and to
19 share a story about (speaking in Native language), about
20 that little girl who only found out her name when she was a
21 teenager but apparently had it all her life.

22 And so I just wanted to acknowledge and say
23 thank you very much for allowing me the time and the space
24 to share my story and -- yes.

25 So I'm just going to sit down now,

1 gracefully.

2 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCK-FLOWERS:** So
3 Commissioner, for the -- for the record, Commissioner, this
4 is Rhonda Lee McIsaac, Gousai's (phon) girl. And I
5 understand that by speaking those words to begin that, for
6 the purposes of the Inquiry, will serve as the oath or
7 affirmation according to the Anishinaabe protocol.

8 And Commissioner, I've provided the summary
9 of evidence and, that being done, I will step back.

10 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Thank
11 you.

12 I'm satisfied with the Anishinaabe language.
13 Thank you.

14 I just need to add the parties of standing
15 that I have on record here are Anne McConville and Bethany
16 Estiverne. If there are any other people with standing,
17 please provide me with your name for the record.

18 And the other party with standing is Lucy
19 Bell.

20 **MS. RHONDA LEE McISAAC:** So in Anishinaabe,
21 I said that my name is Gousai's girl (phon) and I come from
22 the Caribou Clan. And I am from -- I was born in Trout
23 Lake, Ontario, and I grew up in Sioux Lookout and Red Lake
24 and North Bay, and I now live in Skittigit, Haida Gwaii.

25 And so I've moved around a lot. I have

1 lived from coast to coast, and I have moved -- I've moved
2 around a lot in my life. And I always find that a
3 connection to the water has been very close to me.

4 I have many -- there's many stories told
5 about me that I either have no recollection of because I
6 was so young and I really -- so I was born in northwestern
7 Ontario. I was born into the Engekeneb (phon) family.

8 My aunties and my grandmothers caught me at
9 birth and they welcomed me into the world. And I was born
10 on Christmas Day, and my mother -- my biological mother,
11 Margaret Hill, says that I'm always -- I've always been her
12 best present.

13 My mother, Margaret Hill, went to
14 residential school. She was a young mother. She has had
15 10 children that I know of and she -- because of
16 residential school, she suffers from alcohol and she has
17 used that as a coping mechanism.

18 And in doing so, I was first placed into
19 care when I was five months old. And my social workers
20 have recently told me that I was found outside of a bar in
21 Sioux Lookout and my mother was inside drinking.

22 And so you know, it gives me a very twisted
23 image of my childhood, and it also makes me question, you
24 know, just in terms of the addictions that my family faces,
25 how that could happen.

1 And there are many more questions like that
2 about how that could happen to a young girl. And there's
3 been many examples shared with me, and so I will -- I will
4 go through that as I continue telling my story.

5 I was born to Margaret Hill and Roy
6 Engekeneb (phon). Margaret comes from Sioux Lookout,
7 Ontario, and she was a registered member of Lac Seul First
8 Nation. And my father was also a member of Lac Seul First
9 Nation.

10 My grandfather, his name is Harvey Edward
11 Hill, and he was a giant, giant of a man.

12 As a kid, he was very -- to me, he was very
13 tall and, as I've recently learned, indeed, he was tall.
14 And he was very well spoken. He spoke Anishinaabe and
15 English so well that he was a translator in the Courts in
16 Sioux Lookout.

17 And he was very eloquent. He had amazing
18 handwriting, apparently. And all the notes in the Court,
19 you know, they were -- they were in his -- in his hand.

20 And he also earned the nickname "the silver-
21 tongued Indian" in Sioux Lookout. And I had a social
22 worker recently tell me that I probably inherited that and
23 should carry that proudly. And I'm trying very hard --
24 very hard to do that.

25 Growing -- I wanted to show you this, and

1 it's a picture that I have of my grandfather and my
2 grandmother. And I've provided Joseph a copy of that so
3 that will go into the record.

4 So these are my grandparents, and they're
5 amazing people. They both -- they both attended
6 residential school. They had a large family.

7 My biological mother, Margaret, she would --
8 she told me, she said, "Why are you wanting to bring all of
9 this up? Why are you wanting to talk about this?"

10 And she said, "The past is the past and you
11 should leave it there".

12 And that's so hard for her to talk about her
13 time in residential school. I can understand that but, at
14 the same time, there are so many questions that I have and
15 there are so many moments and memories that I wish that I
16 had and that I could remember and that I don't have to rely
17 on other people to tell me those things, but I do because
18 being called a child -- a ward of the state in foster care,
19 I lived in -- so these are my siblings.

20 And this is me. I don't know. I think I
21 was maybe nine years old.

22 And this is my brother. We called him
23 Skeegum (phon). And Skeegum was -- it was a nickname that
24 we gave him because -- God, it's -- I'm going to --
25 anyways, those who know what Skeegum means are probably

1 laughing right now, but he's still known as that.

2 And this is my little sister, and her name
3 is Waboos (phon). And Waboos is a rabbit.

4 And this is my beautiful little sister. Her
5 name is Valerie. And Valerie was 13 months when she was
6 adopted.

7 They have their own stories, and I had
8 permission to share these photos because, you know, they
9 share the same story and they have the same kind of
10 experiences.

11 And they're -- they're just beautiful
12 people. And they carry a lot of the same story, a lot of
13 the same pain. And I just wanted to really honour them
14 because they're my family and I'm so glad to have them.

15 My adopted family, my mother is Edith Doyle
16 and my father is David Doyle. And I was adopted into their
17 family.

18 They had two natural sons, Graham and Jason.
19 And they were -- they were a great family.

20 They -- my father really -- he wanted a
21 large family, and so when we came to be adopted, it was in
22 -- I believe in 1983-84 that we were adopted. And so we
23 moved from northwestern Ontario and to North Bay, Ontario.
24 And so I was the oldest girl at that time.

25 My brother and I duked it out to see who was

1 actually really top dog because my older brother is three
2 years older than me.

3 He won, and I concede that with him. And my
4 -- so we grew up together.

5 And it wasn't always -- wasn't always fun.
6 It wasn't always -- we carried -- being adopted was very
7 hard, and it was -- you know, it's like losing a piece --
8 it is losing a piece of your identity. It is losing a
9 piece of your culture. It is losing a part of -- a part of
10 you and a part of your family.

11 I was old enough to remember where I came
12 from. I was old enough to remember my family. And at that
13 time, I was also speaking Anishinaabe.

14 And I spoke Anishinaabe. That was my first
15 language. And my brothers and my sisters knew the language
16 as well. And we stopped speaking the language when --
17 shortly after we were adopted.

18 And I've been slowly trying to regain that,
19 and by going back to my culture and by speaking with
20 Elders, by hanging around the tents, the sacred fires, and
21 also by applying my culture to my life and remembering that
22 -- that I grew up with a culture that was very strong.

23 And when we were adopted, we tried -- I know
24 that my parents tried to give us the culture that we had,
25 but again, with funding and -- at that point in time, in

1 the early eighties, the friendship centres, you know, they
2 had a lot of -- a lot of funding -- they had a lot more
3 funding than they do now. And so there was more access at
4 that point in time to language and culture.

5 And then, as the years have gone by, that
6 has changed.

7 And I know that, growing up, the friendship
8 centre was a huge part of my life. And in foster care, we
9 accessed the friendship centres.

10 And so that's where, you know, when I first
11 became a dancer I was -- I was a very young fancy shawl
12 dancer. So dancing has been a part of my childhood and I'm
13 very glad to be back to that, and that has taken a really
14 long time.

15 And confidence -- confidence-wise, you know,
16 that -- being away from the culture really had that effect,
17 right. And so to be almost 44 years old now and to be
18 going to school has been definitely an influence from my
19 parents, my adopted parents.

20 They pushed all of us really hard to get an
21 education. And it didn't matter if it was university or
22 college.

23 My father was -- he was a union
24 representative and he supported all of us children and he
25 made sure that he -- while he worked that he had summers

1 with us. And the last day of school, we'd all pack up and
2 we'd go away as a family.

3 And it was -- and it was really good. But
4 at the same time, there was also a part of me that had a
5 really hard time accepting my family. And it took me a
6 long time to actually call my adopted mom my mom. And she
7 laughs -- she laughs now and she -- I remember the first
8 time that I called her "mom" and it was at Mother's Day.
9 And I made her cry and I thought that I'd done something
10 wrong.

11 And she said to me, like, "You didn't do
12 anything wrong. It's just something that I wanted to hear
13 for a very long time".

14 And then the other part was that it took me
15 a long time to accept my mom because I didn't want to
16 betray my biological mom, Margaret. And that was -- that
17 was really hard, but I realized growing up since being
18 adopted that it was okay because my mom -- I have two moms
19 and I have two dads, and very lucky.

20 But at the same time, when I think about
21 that fortune, being blessed in that way, I also think that
22 I know -- I know from my cousins who grew up in Red Lake
23 and in the Meko Saping (phon) that they have a strong
24 connection to that territory and they have a strong
25 connection within their family.

1 And the Anishinaabe really value the family.
2 They really value that. And I -- I'm coming to terms with
3 the fact that I had a different experience.

4 And ultimately, if it's -- I can't -- you
5 know, part of -- I was really angry as a teenager. Really
6 angry. And I carried that around a lot.

7 And I think that, you know, my family really
8 kind of paid for that because I -- I know I stopped
9 speaking to them. I was really silent for about five years
10 and didn't participate with them.

11 I got pregnant when I was 19 years old, and
12 I fell in love with my children's father. And I have two
13 children.

14 They're -- they're so wonderful. They're so
15 beautiful.

16 My daughter is Gaga Combs (phon) and my son
17 is Kaka Combs (phon). And my son is 23 years old. And if
18 I get that wrong, that's going to be just par for course
19 because I can never remember their birth dates. I always
20 have to check.

21 And my daughter just had her birthday. And
22 again, she's -- I hope she's -- anyways, she's amazing.
23 And she has her own story as well.

24 And I tried, along with my ex-husband, to
25 really raise them in a really strong, good way.

1 And when I was a teenager, before I had
2 children I was really -- I drank a lot. I -- probably
3 while I was in college, I think that I was probably sober
4 maybe two days of the week or three days of the week
5 because I had classes.

6 So it was -- I don't know. I can't get mad
7 at my kids and I can't get mad at other people because, you
8 know, alcohol -- I can -- it can make you brave. It can
9 make you stupid. But at the same time, you also feel like
10 you're having a lot of fun.

11 And -- but I knew that once I had my babies
12 that I couldn't do that any more and I had to be a better
13 person, that I had to be a better mom. I had to be a
14 better example because I didn't want my kids -- I didn't
15 want our kids to experience that. I didn't want them to be
16 found out in public left alone and didn't, you know, want
17 the Children's Aid Society involved in my family.

18 I didn't want that because I didn't like it
19 growing up. I felt like nothing was in my control.

20 My social workers, who I've recently been in
21 touch with, one of them said to me, you know -- she said,
22 "God, you were a cute five year old. You were so friendly.
23 You were so kind".

24 And she said, "You were also the oldest five
25 year old" that she'd ever met.

1 And being the oldest five year old, there's
2 something wrong if you're already so old at five years old.
3 You know, at five years old you should be thinking, you
4 know, about, I don't know -- I don't even know what you
5 would think about at five years old.

6 But my social worker also said at five years
7 old that I put on my boots and my coat and I walked from
8 Sioux Mountain across a frozen lake following my mother,
9 who had gone to town that day. And I showed up on Front
10 Street in Sioux Lookout, and somebody found me wandering
11 around.

12 And my social worker went and we tried
13 finding my mom, and we couldn't find her. And my social
14 worker, she's -- she told me, she said, "You were -- you
15 were just wet. You were just soaking wet just from
16 walking".

17 And she said, "I think you said something
18 like I just wanted to see my mom".

19 And so my mom eventually found me and -- but
20 not after I'd had lunch and not after I had, you know, been
21 given a new set of clothes to be dry.

22 And so you know, social workers aren't that
23 bad. I'm having -- I'm learning that what I remember as a
24 kid is not always as bad as you remember it.

25 And growing up, I really, really hated

1 police and I really, really hated social workers. I've
2 lost friends who've become social workers because I had so
3 much anger towards -- towards that profession.

4 And -- and now that I've been in touch with
5 them, I'm -- my social workers, in finding out a little bit
6 more about my childhood, I'm -- I've had to re-look how I
7 see them and realize that they were working under policies
8 that they also had no control over and that, as a 10 year
9 old and as a five month old or as a five year old, that
10 that's not always necessarily explained to you so well.

11 But at the same time, I think that when
12 you're growing up in foster care that you're so vulnerable
13 to the messaging that you hear.

14 I have an adoption book.

15 So when I was adopted, I was given a book.
16 And I hadn't really looked at it. I hadn't really looked
17 at it. And so these photos that I'd showed you come from
18 this book.

19 But what I really -- what really bothered me
20 was some of the messaging in this book.

21 And I don't know who thought of this book.
22 I don't know who -- you know, how it was, but it says here
23 -- you know, it has photos of me, you know, basically when
24 I was eight or nine. There are no -- I don't have any baby
25 photos of myself.

1 And when I had kids, I made sure that there
2 were lots of photos of my kids, and they probably dislike
3 now having a camera shoved in their face. But they have a
4 lot of photos of themselves.

5 But what got me about this book was when it
6 says, "This is what your case worker first told your foster
7 family about you".

8 And I was in, like I said, at least 23
9 different foster homes. And what this says here -- and
10 it's in my own, like, nine year old handwriting, and I can
11 actually read it. And it says, "You were nice" and that I
12 needed a family because my mother got drunk and never took
13 care of us.

14 I really want to swear right now. That's a
15 really hard truth, and that's a really hard truth that you
16 -- that I wrote at nine years old.

17 I don't -- I don't know -- that's not a very
18 positive message for a nine year old. And it's hard. It's
19 a hard truth, and -- but at the same time, it's -- there's
20 reasons for that.

21 And the -- part of the reasons are, you
22 know, my mom attending residential school and my mom being
23 abused and, you know, not having my grandparents there with
24 her and all the suffering that she had in her life . And
25 then she tried to have children and she tried to make

1 everything better. And she tried so hard.

2 And I really -- you know, I really disliked
3 her for the longest time. I'm still a little angry at
4 times with her because I have so many questions, but she
5 doesn't want to talk about it. And so it's taken me a long
6 time to sort of ask those questions.

7 And I think that being -- being adopted at
8 10 years old was -- was amazing, and it allowed me the
9 opportunity to not have to think about, you know, my
10 parents and what they might do or, you know, if I had to
11 walk from Sioux Mountain to Sioux Lookout to get help, to
12 take my brothers and sisters and flee our house because of
13 the parties that were going on.

14 And -- but also being adopted also meant
15 that my status was frozen. And so I was a frozen Indian.

16 And it took -- it took -- I remember it took
17 a lot of work. I remember my parents going through their
18 adoption files and trying to find out the information. And
19 I remember being told that I -- you know, that I didn't
20 exist at that point in time.

21 And it was confusing because, you know, all
22 I wanted was my status card. All I wanted was to --
23 because all my friends, you know, they had those cards.
24 They knew who they were. They knew where they came from,
25 and they could identify themselves.

1 But at the same time, it was like it was
2 frozen, and so I had to wait. And then finally, after
3 applying and, you know, my parents and myself calling and
4 writing letters that -- to find out that I'd been not only
5 frozen, but that since my mother had transferred Bands,
6 somehow our names were also transferred along -- along with
7 her. And so that's how we moved from Lac Seul Band to the
8 Ojibwe Nation of Saugeen and Savant Lake.

9 And you know, that's my -- because I always
10 said to myself, like "I'm from Lac Seul. I'm from Lac
11 Seul".

12 And then to find out that I'm actually from
13 the Ojibwe Nation of Saugeen. You know, you have to think
14 in your mind that you have to change -- you have to change
15 that.

16 And being from the Ojibwe Nation of Saugeen,
17 it's a small Band and it's independent. And they fought
18 really hard to be recognized and to have their reserve
19 where it is.

20 And it's -- you know, it's -- so that's
21 where I'm from.

22 And I've been home there because my mother
23 lives there now. And my biological mother, she -- despite
24 her addictions and -- she speaks her language, and she's a
25 -- she taught in the school. So some of the young children

1 have been educated in Anishinaabemowin.

2 And that makes me really happy to sort of be
3 able to sit in my mother's house. And when I returned home
4 at 19, my father accompanied -- my biological -- or my
5 adopted father -- my dad accompanied me. And he made me
6 work for it.

7 He, you know, said "You have to -- you have
8 to be able to pay your way. You have to be able to do
9 that".

10 And so I worked. I worked in a restaurant,
11 and I worked in the back and -- because I remember the
12 manager saying to me, "Well, I can't actually put you up
13 front". And I remember thinking to myself, "Well, why
14 not?"

15 But maybe it was -- I don't know. I want to
16 say, you know, it was kind of racist. It was they didn't
17 want to see a brown face up front.

18 And so it -- that was -- that was my first
19 kind of run-in with just, you know, not being good enough
20 at that point in time to be out front and to serve people
21 and -- even though that's probably where I was more
22 comfortable.

23 But I had a lot of friends. You know, I had
24 a lot of friends. We had a lot of good times. Good times.

25 My girlfriends in North Bay, they got me

1 through a lot. They got me through high school and I think
2 that my friends really -- they've really carried me.
3 They've really raised me up. And I really -- I'm very
4 blessed to have so many good friends and so many good
5 people because I've travelled across Canada and I've taken
6 my family with me.

7 And again, we're spread out. My daughter
8 and my ex-husband are on the east coast and my son is in
9 Vancouver, and I'm on Haida Gwaii. And we're all following
10 our passions. We're all, you know, finding our way.

11 And I think that a lot of the inter-
12 generational issues that my siblings and I have are also
13 issues that my son and my daughter are having to face, so I
14 tried raising them, you know, without drugs and alcohol.

15 And now that they're adults, they're making
16 their own choices and I have to trust that what I've taught
17 them and what their father has taught them and what our
18 teachers have taught them will carry them forward.

19 And so I am slowly learning that even though
20 those four little kids grew up in the bush and grew up in
21 many different foster homes that we had -- we were also
22 rich. And as poor as -- as poor as we were and -- but we
23 were also so rich.

24 And that my adopted family did very well,
25 and that we -- that we all survived. We survived the

1 poverty. We've survived racism. We've survived abuse.

2 And when I talk about abuse, it's all the
3 abuses. It's mental, spiritual, physical, emotional and
4 definitely, you know, in terms of sexual abuse as well,
5 it's -- it was something that we grew up with.

6 And we made choices to not continue that,
7 and we made choices that were passed on to us by people who
8 were also abused. And that we've had to overcome those
9 things.

10 And when I started this process, when I
11 started thinking about doing a statement, somebody said to
12 me, you know, "Oh, you're a survivor", and it's something
13 that I'd never really described myself as. And it's not
14 something that I actually really thought about.

15 This is just part -- you know, this is my
16 story. This is my experience.

17 But as I've gone through school, I've also
18 learned that, you know, this is also the experience of
19 many, many other people and that this is, unfortunately, a
20 path that a lot of indigenous people still continue to go
21 through today.

22 And that since our family was adopted out,
23 Tikinagan (phon) started in northwestern Ontario because
24 our family said that they didn't want to lose any more
25 children to non-indigenous families and that children

1 should stay within their own families and within their own
2 culture because -- because of the loss of identity, because
3 of the loss of culture and the loss of family ties that
4 happen when you're placed in care and when you're adopted
5 out.

6 And if you're not lucky enough to have a
7 family that valued your -- your identity, that you can lose
8 that.

9 And I think that that is, I think, important
10 as we go ahead, that those policies need to change and that
11 there needs to be access for children to have that access
12 to their culture and their language and to be practising
13 that and to be very proud of that.

14 And I think that in terms of education, I've
15 been very lucky, very fortunate to have had Elders in my
16 life from the time that I was in foster care until the
17 time, you know, when I went back to the friendship centre.
18 I was 16 when I met a fabulous indigenous woman who has
19 been my best friend and has shown me the pride in being an
20 Anishinaabekwe, in wearing regalia, in knowing who (Native
21 language) is and in having a place in ceremony.

22 And I just want to acknowledge my friend,
23 Celina Kada (phon). And she's definitely a strong role
24 model, and she continues to be a strong influence for me.

25 And also, other women have been influential

1 and they've -- they've really taught me to be strong,
2 they've taught me to tell the truth. They've taught me how
3 to stand in -- in my culture. And I really am proud to
4 have those sisters. And I call them sisters because I've
5 chosen them, and they've chosen me.

6 And my good one is sitting over there, and
7 she's an amazing young woman and I'm very proud to have her
8 here with me.

9 And we first met -- God, we were in school
10 together and then we worked together when I went to the
11 Yukon and applied and got a job with Indian and Northern
12 Affairs.

13 And what a learning curve that was. But at
14 the same time, it also speaks a lot to the education that I
15 worked very hard to get.

16 In Grade 5, I had a horrible math teacher.
17 He said to me that I was pulling down his math average. He
18 wanted me to go in to remedial math.

19 And my mother, bless her, she got mad at him
20 and went up and down his body and got the principal
21 involved and said, "How about you try teaching?"

22 So she was fierce. My mother was really
23 fierce and so protective. And then -- I learnt that. I
24 learnt that from her.

25 And God, there were kids in school who --

1 they sent me a hate letter and they signed it with my best
2 friend's name. And then -- so I had to confront that. And
3 I learnt that my best friend, indeed, hadn't signed the
4 letter.

5 And she apologized, and that was really
6 formative. Like that really had an impact because, you
7 know, it was a -- it was done by a group and it was mostly
8 non-indigenous students. And you know, it -- bullying was
9 horrible growing up.

10 And you know, thank goodness for my family
11 standing up and being there for me and -- but also
12 educating me at the same time to actually stand up for
13 myself and to speak against bullying and racism and to work
14 in an -- towards being non-oppressive and balanced because
15 a lot of people, you know -- a lot of it is ignorance and
16 they don't know any better.

17 And so going through that, you know, really
18 taught me a lot and it also taught me how to forgive those
19 people because they don't know any better.

20 And sadly, it still happens, you know. You
21 still have hate, you still have racism, you still have
22 ignorance. And I think that a lot of Aboriginal
23 communities also have a lot of lateral violence. And it
24 makes a difference if you have somebody who can speak up
25 and who is a role model.

1 And I try really hard to be that person.

2 And I also try really hard to be balanced
3 and to come from a -- from a good place. And I realize
4 that I haven't always been that way and that it's been a
5 learning curve.

6 And in terms of the education that I've
7 gotten, it has been both experiential, cultural and
8 academic. I've learnt -- it took me 13 years of part-time
9 study while I was raising my children to get my Bachelor's
10 in English literature and a minor in the Arts of Canada
11 from the University of Victoria. Shout out.

12 I learnt a lot there. And I also learnt
13 that I'm smart enough.

14 It took me a really long time to get that
15 and to really understand the value of education.

16 When I was at Trent University and first
17 studying Canadian history and indigenous studies, I met a
18 professor, John Wadlend (phon), and you know, he took us
19 out into Temagami and we hiked into Lake Temagami and we
20 took our canoes. And we had an awesome amazing class in
21 the middle of Lake Temagami.

22 And if you can imagine, you know, like a
23 canoe rafted to 12, 14 other canoes and you're floating and
24 you're learning about history and you're learning about
25 Temagami and you're learning about activism. What an

1 amazing experience that is and how that impacts you not
2 only in your mind, but also your spirit.

3 And that continues today because I'm doing a
4 Master's in Education through the University of Northern
5 British Columbia in Prince George. And that has taken me a
6 very long time to complete.

7 I started it after my term ended with INAC,
8 and I realized that in my term at INAC I wanted to tell the
9 stories of indigenous people. I didn't really want to tell
10 Canada's story because it wasn't my story, and -- but I
11 wanted to tell the story of four Yukon First Nation women
12 Chiefs.

13 And that is -- has been the most amazing
14 story that I am trying to wrap my head around. And part of
15 that has to do with what I'm wearing today. It is actually
16 a huge part of why I'm wearing this -- my regalia today.

17 Education, like I said, has really saved me.
18 When I started my Master's, I -- it was hard. It's not a
19 field that I actually thought that I would get into,
20 education, and not like in a teacher sort of -- I'm
21 definitely not a teacher in that sort of sense. But I like
22 telling stories. It's what I do for a living. I'm a
23 writer in Haida Gwaii, and I write a lot of poetry as well.
24 And I do a lot of -- you know, my -- I'm responsible for a
25 lot of my regalia and a lot of my beading.

1 And it's taken me a long time to get there
2 and to do that. And I think that cultural education and
3 that experiential education has a lot more value than a
4 piece of paper or the BA or the MEd or the PhD that -- that
5 I really want to get but, at the same time, you know, I
6 also really want to continue on with my regalia and I want
7 to continue learning in that way, but -- so I want to show
8 you my regalia and I want to explain to you what it means.

9 And it also gives me impetus to like, you
10 know, complete my -- the last few chapters of my project,
11 of my Master's project.

12 And yeah. So I really want to honour --
13 honour that, and I want to honour those teachings that are
14 inside me.

15 As a -- as a young girl, I delivered
16 newspapers. That was one of my first jobs. And I lugged
17 around the Toronto Star. And I don't know if any of you
18 have, you know, picked up that heavy newsprint -- and I
19 think we delivered over 200 copies, and then also the North
20 Bay Nugget.

21 And I always read the front page. And as a
22 writer, I went to journalism -- I went to school for
23 journalism and then got my English literature BA. And so
24 writing has always been a coping mechanism and it's been a
25 way to tell my story.

1 And so now I'm branching out and I'm
2 learning how to tell stories in different ways. And this
3 is one way that I can tell a different story.

4 And you know, I acknowledge the four Yukon
5 women Chiefs that told me their stories, and I tried to
6 blend the western academic and my Anishinaabe ways. And
7 I'm not sure if I've been successful in it. I'll see.

8 And -- but I think I've done the best that I
9 can with what I've been taught and with what I've been
10 sharing, and so I'm just going to explain that to you.

11 So when I think about indigenous education,
12 when I think about all the grandmothers who have come ahead
13 of me and those grandmothers that stand behind me and the
14 grandmothers that stand in all the directions, I think that
15 they're leaders and that, as leaders, as water carriers, as
16 women that give birth to the next generations that they all
17 have those leadership qualities in them.

18 And so the grandmother print that I wear,
19 that my mother chose, she -- she chose it and she chose the
20 colours that -- I told her that my traditional colours are
21 red, white and black, and with yellow accent.

22 And so she chose a nice blue print, and so
23 it's a grandmother print because it's a floral.

24 And so when I think about women in
25 leadership, I think about all the various forms of

1 leadership. It doesn't have to be -- you know, you don't
2 have to be called a Chief. You don't have to be called an
3 Elder. You don't have to be called a judge. You don't
4 have to be called a lawyer. You don't -- you know,
5 everybody's a leader.

6 And our women are strong leaders. Our
7 women, you know, are -- they're just so important.

8 And so I chose to -- I choose to honour them
9 in that way.

10 And the four stories of the Yukon First
11 Nation women, they all had individual paths. And so those
12 paths are described here in the bias tape, in the ribbon
13 that I use on my dress. And you'll see that it goes all
14 the way around in a circle, and it's because they're always
15 learning. They're always sharing the knowledge that they -
16 - that they've learnt. And so these four women shared
17 their stories with me.

18 And so in the academic sense, I've had to
19 find ways how to transfer that knowledge so that, you know,
20 the academics can understand it, so that other people who
21 come behind me and want to study the work can understand it
22 as well.

23 So each tab represents -- the black or the
24 red tabs, those are my terms. Those are my themes.

25 And what's attached are the jingles, and the

1 jingles are -- have been made by my auntie, Karen Daneman
2 (phon). And they're a -- they come from -- and we rolled
3 these. We cut these ourselves.

4 And we did it, gosh, many, many years ago
5 now. We did it at a literature conference in Winnipeg, and
6 we sat in the back of the room. We tried not to make
7 noise. But as you can see, we probably made more noise
8 than usual, but -- so we rolled them. And these ones are
9 made out of Carnation cans.

10 And Carnation cans honour my grandmother
11 because that's -- that's the milk that she had. That's the
12 material that she had, and that's what sustained us when we
13 were growing up.

14 And so you know, when you go to Nanny
15 Kukum's (phon) house, you know, there's always Carnation
16 milk on the table. And so that's what these are.

17 And so as the maker -- and I had help making
18 this dress, and it is -- the ladies are Marcia and her
19 daughter, Celeste Pedry (phon), Dr. Celeste Pedry, helped
20 make this dress. And they made it because I needed to heal
21 while I was in university because I was going through a
22 separation and a divorce. And I really lost who I was.

23 And so in order to help me, they helped make
24 this dress. And the red cuffs are a form of protection for
25 me as a dancer because when you're dancing the jingle

1 dress, you're not just dancing for -- I'm not just dancing
2 for myself. I'm dancing for everybody in that circle.

3 I'm also dancing for those who cannot dance.
4 I'm also dancing for those who could never dance, for those
5 women who were told that -- that this wasn't proper, that
6 this was not healthy, that they were heathens if they
7 danced, and those women that were hurt because they
8 couldn't speak their language.

9 And so this is where this dress came from,
10 and I dreamt about this. And when I -- when I was gifted
11 this dress, Robin Celeste -- they took me to a powwow in
12 Yaletown in the round house, and I danced there for the
13 first time in many, many years. And it was an honour to
14 wear this dress, and it's been an honour to wear this
15 dress. And this is my education.

16 And yes, it blends western and it blends
17 Anishinaabe teachings, but because I am Anishinaabe, the
18 work that I do is Anishinaabe centred. It is women
19 centred. And it is strong academic work.

20 And I think that the education system really
21 needs to honour the cultural ways. We need to place that
22 at the forefront. And I'm so thankful that there's many
23 people that are working towards that, that there are many
24 people calling for that, for that change, that our Elders
25 should be paid the same as tenured professors, that you

1 don't need a PhD in order to teach at university, and that
2 they've earned that education, that they've earned that
3 right to be there in that classroom teaching people like me
4 who want to learn, and that the western way isn't the best
5 way. It is not the right way.

6 And I'm so glad that I get to do the work
7 that I do because it places being indigenous at the
8 forefront, and that's so important because growing up, I
9 didn't see a lot of that. I didn't see a lot of the -- in
10 the textbooks, I didn't see a lot of that -- those examples
11 in school and high school. And that's really important,
12 and our kids needs to see that. My kids need to see that.

13 And we need to go back to having our culture
14 and we need to go back to speaking our language, and we
15 need to go back to walking gently on this earth and not
16 taking things like resources, disrespecting that.

17 That's really important because we need
18 fresh water. We need our traditional medicines. We need
19 that connection to the land because it makes us stronger.
20 We need that connection to our language because it makes us
21 stronger.

22 We need those connections to our families
23 because it does make us stronger.

24 We need our women to be valued. We need our
25 children to know that they are valued, that they matter

1 because that little girl, that five year old girl, that 10
2 year old girl, all those little girls and those little boys
3 need to know that they're valued, that they're not
4 disposable and that they don't deserve to be hurt the way
5 that they've been hurt.

6 Migwetch.

7 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Wow,
8 Rhonda, what a great education you've given us in this room
9 today, and people watching. You're a real teacher.

10 I think that even though you might not think
11 you are, I think you're a fabulous teacher. Maybe some day
12 I can come to your class.

13 Thank you for sharing your story with all of
14 us. I've learned a lot, and humbled by your experience.

15 A couple of things. I can see the beautiful
16 child is still in your face, and I hope you never lose
17 that.

18 We believe, of course, in the principle of
19 reciprocity, and so in order to thank you for sharing your
20 sacred gift, your story, with us, we want to thank you by
21 giving you some seeds. They are from here because we don't
22 want to introduce foreign seeds, of course, a fire weed.
23 And they're so resilient, those plants. They're amazing,
24 just like you.

25 So please accept this on behalf of all of us

1 for sharing your sacred story with us today. Plant the
2 seeds, please, and let us know what happens.

3 **MS. RHONDA LEE McISAAC:** So if you note just
4 on our photo, there's fire weed.

5 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** And then
6 the matriarch from Haida Gwaii instructed some people to
7 harvest eagle feathers for us to give to families and
8 survivors. We know we don't argue with the matriarchs of
9 Haida Gwaii.

10 So I don't have to tell you the importance,
11 the significance of an eagle feather, but it's important
12 for us. So on behalf of the matriarchs, but also from all
13 of us at the National Inquiry, thank you so much for being
14 with us, for sharing your story.

15 **--- Exhibits (code: P1P020205)**

16 **Exhibit 1:** Colour digital photograph of prompt "This is
17 what your caseworker first told your foster
18 family about you" with response written in
19 dark blue ink.

20 **Exhibit 2:** Colour digital photograph said to depict
21 Rhonda Lee McIsaac's little sister as a
22 toddler.

23 **Exhibit 3:** Colour digital photograph of prompt "Your
24 caseworker asked your foster family to take
25 care of you..." with handwritten response

1 "because my mother drinks" in dark black
2 ink.

3 **Exhibit 4:** Colour digital photograph said to depict
4 Rhonda Lee McIsaac's grandparents.

5 **Exhibit 5:** Colour digital photograph said to depict
6 Rhonda Lee McIsaac as a young girl.

7 --- Upon Recessing at 11:04

8 --- Upon resuming at 1:45 p.m.

9 **Hearing # 6**

10 **Witnesses: Roddy, Violet and Winnie Sampare**

11 **In Relation to Jean Virginia Sampare**

12 **Heard by Chief Commissioner Marion Buller**

13 **Commission Counsel: Breen Ouellette**

14 **Clerk: Gladys Wraight, Registrar: Bryan Zandberg**

15 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** (Speaking Native
16 language)

17 Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank you
18 for coming to support us this afternoon. I'd like to thank
19 the Wet'suwet'en Chiefs for allowing us on their territory
20 to talk about my sister that went missing in 1971. I'm
21 very thankful.

22 And it's our tradition to do a lament song
23 for the people that are gone on before us so I'll ask my
24 sister to do that part.

25 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** (Singing in Native

1 language).

2 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** And I'd like to thank
3 you, Breen, for doing this, and I'd like to thank the
4 Commissioner for coming to hear our story.

5 Thank you very much.

6 **(SHORT PAUSE)**

7 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Thank you, Chief
8 Commissioner.

9 For the record, my name is Breen Ouellette
10 and I am counsel for the National Inquiry.

11 It is my honour to introduce the Sampare
12 family. From my right, I present Roddy and Violet, husband
13 and wife; and to the right of Violet is Winnie. Winnie and
14 Roddy are siblings.

15 I also want to recognize that their sister,
16 Anna, was unable to attend today, and our thoughts and
17 prayers go out to her.

18 And then we have family members in the back.
19 So if you would like to introduce them, Roddy.

20 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** The one sitting right
21 behind me is my daughter, Virginia, and her husband, Jim
22 Woodward. And Violet's niece, Marilyn; our niece, she's
23 here to support us this afternoon.

24 And another thing that I forgot earlier was
25 to thank the family that made time for us to have this

1 spot. We've been having a rough time in Smithers here, so
2 I'm very thankful to that family that gave us their spot.

3 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Thank you.

4 So Ms. Registrar, the Sampare family has
5 requested to affirm using an eagle feather.

6 **MS. GLADYS WRAIGHT:** Thank you.

7 So my name is Gladys; I'm the Registrar with
8 the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. So I just -- I
9 understand that you wanted to affirm with the eagle
10 feather.

11 **RODDY SAMPARE, Affirmed:**

12 **VIOLET SAMPARE, Affirmed:**

13 **WINNIE SAMPARE, Affirmed:**

14 **MS. GLADYS WRAIGHT:** I just wanted to
15 mention today that the parties in standing that we have are
16 Lucy Bell and Taryn Walsh; identified themselves.

17 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Roddy, I want to offer
18 you this cedar tie in support of your testimony today.

19 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Thank you.

20 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And Violet, I want to
21 offer you this cedar tie in support of your testimony
22 today.

23 And, Winnie, I want to provide you with this
24 cedar tie in support of your testimony today.

25 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Thank you.

1 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And in honour of the
2 family members that are sitting here, I want to offer them
3 cedar ties in honour of their support.

4 Roddy, for the benefit of everybody present,
5 would you please explain your role and the role of your
6 family in the community?

7 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** I am Hereditary Chief
8 of the Frog Clan in Gitsegukla. I look after the Frog Clan
9 in my house, the house of (inaudible), and that would be my
10 sister and all their kids.

11 So it's -- we have one house that I look
12 after in the community of Gitsegukla. And we all work
13 together at peace to do what we need to do to bury or to
14 have a baptism or a wedding; we all work together to do
15 that kind of work.

16 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Thank you.

17 Roddy, would you please tell the
18 Commissioner the name of the family member you have come to
19 speak about today?

20 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** We lost my sister on
21 the highway in October 14th, 1971. Her name was Jean
22 Virginia Sampare. And today we have never found or heard
23 from her. We keep looking; whenever there's a possible
24 sighting, we go and check it out. We always look for her.
25 We're hoping that she's still alive somewhere, but 46 years

1 ago is a long time and I don't think she was that mad at
2 us.

3 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Roddy, could you tell
4 the Commissioner the name that your family commonly
5 referred to your sister?

6 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** She was always called
7 Virginia because there was other Jean names in the
8 community, so Mum and Dad just called her Virginia.

9 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Thank you. And how
10 old was Virginia when she went missing?

11 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** She was 18 years of
12 age when she went missing. She'd just had a birthday, 18th
13 birthday in September.

14 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And how would you
15 describe Virginia, as an 18 year old?

16 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** She was a pretty quiet
17 kid and she was strong, very strong. Our Mum and Dad made
18 us do a lot of work, and we weren't allowed to go and play
19 out after 9 o'clock at night, we were -- we had to be home.
20 They were really strict on us.

21 She was a fair-headed girl. And we were
22 always taught that suicide was never the answer to any
23 problems that may arise. So I feel bad when I hear people
24 say now, "Oh, she committed suicide." That was not the --
25 I think she was probably one of the first ladies that were

1 taken in 1971 on the Highway of Tears.

2 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Was Virginia involved
3 in any of these so-called high-risk activities?

4 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** No, she wasn't. She
5 was -- we were kept a close eye on by our parents. She --
6 we usually walked to the store at the Skinner Crossing,
7 they called it; it's about a mile away from the Reserve,
8 where they had a little restaurant and a store for food and
9 mail that came.

10 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** So she was just a
11 normal, healthy, 18-year-old girl?

12 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Yes, she was.

13 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Where was Virginia
14 residing at that time?

15 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** She was living with
16 Mum and Dad, and we were living with Mum and Dad too, in
17 Gitsegukla. I was working in Terrace at the time. We had
18 already gotten the rent and she was supposed to move with
19 us later that -- during later that month. But we spent a
20 lot of time searching instead.

21 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And why had Virginia
22 returned home to live with your parents?

23 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Her boyfriend drowned
24 in Cashore (phonetic) Packing Company where she was
25 working. She was working at the cannery, and her boyfriend

1 was fishing; and they drowned in the cannery, in the water
2 there on the Skeena.

3 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And you were at your
4 parents' at the time as well, you and Violet. And what was
5 your situation?

6 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** I'd just gotten back
7 from fishing and my boss at Pauley Lumber had called me
8 back to work at the sawmill. Like, I drive forklift for
9 them, and one of the kids had to go to -- go back to
10 school, so I was called back to go to work at the mill.
11 And we hadn't really found a place to rent in Terrace yet,
12 so that's what we worked on and -- before we moved to
13 Terrace, we had to stay with Mum and Dad.

14 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And Roddy, am I
15 correct in my understanding that you had just recently
16 married and you had a new baby?

17 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** That's right. We got
18 married on August 27 and our boy was born September 4th. So
19 I worked pretty fast.

20 **(LAUGHTER)**

21 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Violet, I have a
22 question for you. I understand that among the family
23 testifying here today, that you were the last person to see
24 Virginia. Is that right?

25 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** Yes. I was at home the

1 night she left the house. It was late at night. My
2 mother-in-law had just come back from Hazelton, or wherever
3 they were, just her. My father-in-law didn't come in with
4 her. My sister-in-laws [sic]; there was two of them, the
5 youngest one is Sandra and the other was Virginia. They
6 were in a bedroom to the back of the house.

7 When my mother-in-law came in, she just
8 greeted me and I greeted her as well and then she proceeded
9 to go to the kitchen. And then the kitchen is also located
10 to the back of the house. It's a very small house so not a
11 whole lot of rooms. And I guess from there, she went to
12 see the girls because they were in the bedroom that they
13 share.

14 And not long after she came home, Virginia
15 came out, and I'm assuming she was crying; like, it looked
16 like she was crying and she -- I just looked at her. And
17 she didn't even look at me. I tried to ask her what was
18 wrong, and she just went straight to the door, opened the
19 door and walked out. And I tried to call her and I asked
20 her where she was going and my mother-in-law came out and
21 then I told her, I said, "I'll go and get her, I'll ask her
22 where she's going." And then she said, "No, you stay here
23 because -- baby." She said, "You stay here. She'll come
24 back." She said, "She'll come back."

25 So we didn't do anything. And that was the

1 last time I seen her, when she walked out of the house.
2 And this was, like, between 10:00 and 11:00; like, it was
3 quite late in the evening.

4 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Did anyone else you
5 know see her that night? Yes, Violet.

6 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** Yeah.

7 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Did anyone else see
8 her that night?

9 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** I heard people talking
10 and I guess her cousin -- my husband's cousin, Alvin Hyrams
11 (phonetic), was another person that had seen her later that
12 day, or that night. I'm not certain of the details of
13 that, just from what I read and -- because it was just
14 recently that I learned that he was one of the last ones to
15 see her, and she was on the road. So ---

16 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** So does -- who here
17 knows the details of what Alvin saw the best? Is it you?

18 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** I don't know.

19 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** (Speaking Native
20 language)

21 Somebody told us, to get a bike.

22 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** I don't know who
23 actually got the information; I don't even remember.

24 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** But you've heard
25 information?

1 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** But there's information
2 that Alvin Hyrams (phonetic) was one of the ones that's --
3 I don't know who gave the information that he was walking
4 with her and he decided that he was going to go back and
5 get his bike so that he can ride his bike and -- because
6 she mentioned that what Roddy said, thinking that she was
7 going to that store which is down to the railway crossing
8 bridge. There's a railway crossing bridge, and by that --
9 close to that bridge there used to be a store; mailboxes
10 and whatnot were in the same area. And I think just up the
11 road from there, there's this train station.

12 And he didn't want to walk, I guess, all the
13 way to the store so he decided -- well, he said -- he told
14 her that he was going to go run back and grab -- because he
15 was just below his house, because their house was just up
16 the road from where the bridge was. And he wanted to go
17 and grab his bike.

18 So he rode his bike back down to the highway
19 and when he got back to the area where he last seen her, he
20 had heard a vehicle door close but she was nowhere to be
21 seen.

22 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Violet, do you know
23 when the family first tried to report her missing?

24 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** My recollection was
25 that my in-laws went to the Band office right that morning

1 because she didn't come back. My Mum -- our mother-in-law
2 thought that she would come back in, because they didn't
3 lock the door. They thought she would come and go back --
4 you know, go to bed and -- but she didn't. She didn't.
5 And so they decided they were going to go to the Band
6 office.

7 And their -- I'm not sure who at the Band
8 office they spoke to and they were told that they had to
9 wait a certain amount of time before they could report it
10 to the RCMP, but we learned that's not true; that there was
11 no such waiting time to report someone missing.

12 But what they did from there, they went to
13 Hazelton -- or to South Hazelton where Winnie resided.
14 Winnie lived in South Hazelton at that time because she was
15 married then, had her own family. And my other sister,
16 Anna, was living with her partner and they lived in
17 Kitamaat. So they decided they were going to go and check
18 to see if Virginia had gone to their homes and she wasn't
19 found there.

20 And then they decided they were going to go
21 to the RCMP after they checked all the friends. I think
22 they believed that she had friends in Kispiox as well,
23 which is where I'm originally from. And they didn't find
24 anything or any information at all, if she was seen by any
25 one of her friends; or even Winnie and Anna, she didn't

1 show up there. So they decided they were going to go to
2 the RCMP and they did their missing person's report.

3 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** So, Winnie, do you
4 remember your parents coming to look for Virginia? Could
5 you just speak into the microphone?

6 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Yes.

7 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Do you remember the
8 date?

9 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Well, they'd taken time
10 to go look around first and then they said, "We're really
11 worried. Virginia didn't come home." And that was like
12 two days after she got missing on the 14th. And then after
13 Mum and Dad told the police that she didn't come home,
14 that's when the police started the search going; and
15 village people helped out, they searched all over, yeah.

16 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Thank you.

17 So, Roddy, Winnie mentioned a search. Were
18 you involved in that search?

19 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Yes. Whenever I come
20 home from work, I would help the village searchers search,
21 and we did it till the snow fell, even after the search and
22 rescues had completed their search in a week or two, then
23 we kept going for -- till the snow fell, the whole village.

24 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** So as a matter of
25 time, did the village start searching first or was it the

1 RCMP that started searching first, and how long did each of
2 those searches last?

3 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** I think the village
4 people started the search when Mum and Dad were really
5 worried, and then the RCMP joined in the search. And then
6 they called it off. They wanted us not to touch anything
7 in the bush or near the rivers. They had a police dog from
8 come from Peace River and they did the week search with the
9 dogs that they had brought with them from Peace River.

10 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And so that was a
11 week-long search. Did they find anything?

12 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** No, they didn't.

13 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And then when you said
14 the town searched for -- until the snowfall; that was a
15 restart up until the police left?

16 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Yes, that's right.
17 They started up again because they seen Mum and Dad going
18 out, checking.

19 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And, Winnie, did you
20 participate in the search as well?

21 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Yes. I was up at the
22 camp where people were fed; people were bringing food and
23 stuff like that, and walking around in the bush -- bushes,
24 looking. Even Captain Douglas was there. He's from
25 Glenvale. Yeah.

1 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And, Roddy, would you
2 call the search thorough?

3 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Oh, yes, it was
4 thorough. They did the bush and they did the river search,
5 checked along the banks right from Kitselas Canyon to
6 (inaudible); nothing was ever found.

7 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And after those
8 searches concluded has there ever been any progress since?

9 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** No, there hasn't.
10 We've just been hearing rumours that she's been sighted,
11 and Violet and I would go to Vancouver and check it out.
12 Usually come to a dead end.

13 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And just for
14 clarification, why were you going to Vancouver to check it
15 out?

16 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** We got a phone call
17 that my sister was sighted at the PNE, so we decided to go
18 down the next day. Got our kids ready and we went to check
19 it out. And our cousin, Melvin was down here, he was
20 helping us check it out.

21 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And, Winnie and
22 Violet, I know that -- this question is aimed at both of
23 you; what communications have you had from the RCMP in
24 recent years?

25 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** When they come to take

1 the DNA and they said there's nothing -- "No news yet for
2 you but we come to take your DNA so that when something
3 comes up, then we'll call you and let you know if we have
4 something for you."

5 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And do either of you
6 remember the name of the officer you spoke with?

7 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** I don't.

8 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** We had -- because of my
9 work in the community, I knew this one officer; his name
10 was Don Wrigglesworth. He was a very kind and
11 compassionate RCMP that I have gotten to meet and he was
12 really good in our communities. And when the whole
13 Penticton issue came up, I think this is why some files
14 were -- from my understanding, our sister's file was closed
15 and it got opened up again with some information about
16 trying to find connections or if there was any connections
17 to the Pickton case. And I think this is why the whole DNA
18 thing was started, just to ensure that her DNA wasn't found
19 in the area.

20 So Don came knocking on our door and
21 mentioned it to us so he wanted to collect DNA from all of
22 the siblings, which included my husband and my sisters --
23 all my sister-in-laws [*sic*]. So that was done.

24 And just recently, I guess, someone from the
25 RCMP detachment in Hazelton contacted Winnie and wanted her

1 to bring in a copy of the photo so she did that. And I
2 think we gave you copies of that yesterday, the clipping --
3 Winnie kept clippings from the newspaper about our sister
4 going missing. And she also had a picture that was taken
5 around the time she had a birthday. Like, her birthday's
6 in September, early September; September 10th.

7 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Tenth (10th).

8 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** She had just turned 18
9 in September and she went missing in October. And the
10 photo that we have, which is -- which the Missing and
11 Murdered Women have, and within their group and it's this
12 photo here. And this is an old high school picture. This
13 is one of the best pictures we ever had of her.

14 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** And then just a few
15 days ago we also seen a picture that Winnie had, and that
16 was actually taken by Virginia's own camera, because she
17 went to visit Winnie. So I'll let Winnie explain that.

18 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** It was about three
19 weeks before her birthday, and she came and she was happy.
20 She's happy to come and see me and Sandra, my sister. And
21 she took pictures of my son. He was only three years old
22 then.

23 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** I was like a mother to
24 my younger siblings, Anna, Virginia, and Sandra, when Mum
25 and Dad were busy working the boats and fishing. I was the

1 young mother till I turned 16 and I started working myself.
2 I loved to look after them when they'd get sick of have
3 measles. I pretend to be a nurse for them and put blankets
4 up on the windows to keep them in the dark. That's what
5 we're supposed to do when people have measles, I told them,
6 and they listened to me. My poor little siblings.

7 And they still look up to me as a Mum right
8 now because Mum and Dad are both gone, yeah. And whenever
9 they have a question, they ask me and I'm there for them
10 all the time.

11 Thank you.

12 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And Winnie, I'm just
13 going to pass you the two newspaper clippings that you
14 provided as well.

15 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Do I read it?

16 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** You could just read
17 the headline or you could read any part of it that you want
18 to read out.

19 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Okay. This one says:

20 "Search Continues for Girl. The search
21 continues in the Hazelton area today
22 for 18-year-old Virginia Sampare,
23 missing from her home since October
24 14th. Poor weather conditions restrict
25 the use of helicopters in the search,

1 but with the aid of the people of the
2 area and a police dog from the Peace
3 River area, Hazelton RCMP are still
4 scouring the surrounding hills.
5 Nothing concrete has yet been
6 discovered that might lead the
7 searchers to the girl, although a
8 number of footprints found scattered
9 over areas yesterday led the searchers
10 to believe the girl was in the area."

11 (As read)

12 And this one says:

13 "Search Called Off. Hazelton RCMP have
14 called off the search for 18-year-old
15 Virginia Sampare who went missing from
16 her home at 11:00 p.m. October 14th. No
17 conclusive signs were found in the two-
18 week search, although a police dog had
19 been brought in from the Peace River
20 area. RCMP said that no doubt the
21 villagers will continue the search
22 indefinitely." (As read)

23 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Thank you.

24 Winnie, Roddy mentioned earlier that they
25 had gone to Vancouver looking for Virginia. When you

1 travel, have you found yourself preoccupied with looking
2 for her?

3 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Yes, everywhere I went.
4 We went for a trip to the Yukon, I'm looking. Anyone that
5 looks like her, I will try to follow them and see if it's
6 her. No. Then I worked here in Smithers at -- what do
7 they call that beer and wine restaurant over there?

8 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Twin Valley.

9 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** Oh yeah, Twin Valley.
10 And I was taking -- those towel tops off the tables go do
11 the laundry and I thought, "Hey, that looks like Virginia."
12 But then I had an armload of -- so I thought I'll take them
13 downstairs, come back and check it out. I should have
14 checked it out first and then -- yeah. I'm always doing
15 stuff like that, trying to find her in any way. Just keep
16 looking.

17 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Right to this day.

18 Roddy, can you describe for the Commissioner
19 the other impacts on your family that have happened because
20 of Virginia's disappearance?

21 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** I remember one time --
22 Mum was still alive -- on the Band list they had her as
23 deceased. So Mum got a hold of me and said, "The Band is
24 having a meeting tonight. You have to come with me." I
25 said, "Okay." So she asked the Band, she said, "If my

1 daughter is deceased, can you take me to where she's at so
2 I can bring her home and put her to rest?" That's what my
3 Mum said to the Band Council at the time. And today on the
4 Band list she is just listed as missing. They've changed
5 it from deceased to missing.

6 It's really impacted our family quite a bit.
7 No matter where we go, we're always looking. We named our
8 oldest daughter after her; we named her Virginia. And then
9 she was worked in Toronto and in -- doing files for health
10 and she looked, trying to find if she had applied for
11 medicine or anything back in Toronto, and she didn't find
12 anything. She worked in the big office in Toronto.

13 We're always looking. We're not going to
14 stop till -- and like my Mum said, the only time we rest is
15 when we put her to rest and we know that's she's resting.
16 But right now she's still missing.

17 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** Like Roddy and Winnie
18 shared, you know, everywhere we went. Roddy was a
19 commercial fisherman and we're down the coast every summer.
20 We both work; he fishes and we worked in the cannery.
21 Winnie worked in the canneries.

22 And after fishing, we'd take our children
23 and we'd go to Vancouver. Most of you know that they have
24 the PNE in Vancouver, so we always like to take our kids
25 shopping as well as going to the PNE every summer. Like,

1 after fishing was done we'd take a trip. And during those
2 trips we always, always -- you know, were always looking.
3 Roddy and I would go in bars and look, even on the downtown
4 east side, which wasn't really that bad back then. We'd go
5 into the bars down that street, the main downtown area on
6 the east side there, and also on Granville Street there's
7 bars. And we'd walk in those bars and look.

8 His cousins were with us because we always
9 seem to travel together; his cousin, Melvin. Because he's
10 so close to his cousins and being a fisherman, like, we
11 always went on holidays after fishing was over. And we'd
12 always go to Vancouver and there we were always looking,
13 and they were looking. So we had a lot of people have
14 sightings and they'd tell us, "Oh, we seen someone that
15 looked like her." So we'd always take off and go
16 investigate ourselves. And it's hard. You know, we may
17 look like we don't -- we're not doing anything but whenever
18 were out of our community, in a different community, we're
19 looking at people, you know. We're looking at people that
20 may look similar to her and we make sure that it's not her.

21 So -- and it's so hard because our children,
22 like even Sandra, our youngest sister, she has three boys.
23 She never got to meet them. She hadn't met them. She
24 hasn't met our children. She got to meet Winnie's son
25 because he's the oldest of all the grandchildren.

1 So it's very hard. I can imagine how my own
2 daughter feels being named after someone she doesn't even
3 know. All she knows is that it's her auntie.

4 So it's hard a really, really hard impact on
5 our whole family.

6 Thank you.

7 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** How -- for our
8 understanding; you've alluded to it, but for our
9 understanding how do you describe the pain of having a
10 family member disappear into thin air?

11 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** It's just like going to
12 a funeral and crying over your loved one, how it hurts.
13 The pain is terrible. It's always there, that pain. Every
14 October 14th, and it's coming again. My sister, Anna, said,
15 and Sandra, my baby sister, "We should go and have a
16 candlelight (inaudible) was last seen, maybe we'll feel a
17 little bit better doing stuff like that," she said. And I
18 said, "That's a good idea. Let Roddy know." Because he's
19 our Chief, we always let him know what we plan.

20 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** The pain doesn't go
21 away. You know, I was sitting in the other room there and
22 listening to the people that lost their loved ones through
23 murder, you know. At least some of them have had the
24 chance to buried their loved one. We didn't get that
25 chance. It really hurts inside, and still does today. It

1 doesn't go away. We pray and hope that we'd have a
2 peaceful ending one way or another. If we can find her,
3 lay her to rest if she's dead; if she's alive, we'd love
4 her.

5 It's hard to lose somebody that you love to
6 begin with and it's harder and harder each year goes by.
7 Mum waited for her. Before she died of cancer, she waited
8 and waited. They gave her a week to live in Vancouver. I
9 asked them to fly her back to Hazelton on a mercy flight,
10 and she got transferred back. And she lasted three months.
11 They gave her a week in Vancouver but she lasted three
12 months because she was waiting for her daughter to come and
13 see her before she left. That never happened.

14 I didn't tell Breen that earlier when we had
15 the interview but that's what Mum did, she waited and
16 waited because she thought Virginia was going to come and
17 see her before she died. That didn't happen.

18 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Thank you.

19 I understand that your family has recently
20 had an opportunity to talk with the RCMP about their file.
21 Can you tell me about that?

22 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** I'm not sure how that
23 was -- that came about, but Roddy got a call at our home --
24 because I work at the health centre. And Roddy got a call
25 at home just a few days ago before we were actually told

1 what day to be here. And RCMP wanted to meet with him and
2 his family, and we actually met with them yesterday and he
3 shared with us -- he managed to get a copy of the file, and
4 he shared that the file was closed in 1995.

5 I guess back then they only keep the file
6 open for so long and -- but when the whole Pickton case
7 came up, the file was opened up and it is still open again.
8 So -- and they do have -- one of the good things that came
9 out of that meeting was that they now have DNA that's on
10 file and in case there is some findings and they can do
11 some testing, and that if -- like I said, if something
12 comes up, they'll contact us.

13 And the other shocking information for us
14 was that he shared that our Chief Councillor and others --
15 I'm not sure who the others were; there were no other names
16 mentioned -- had gone to the RCMP detachment and told them
17 that there was footprints found at the Gitsegukla River and
18 they believed that it was hers.

19 And the reason why I say it's shocking
20 information is that information from the Chief Councillor
21 wasn't shared with the family. Like, this was new to us
22 yesterday; that information wasn't shared to the parents or
23 to the rest of the family back then. Why was that not
24 shared? I guess, assuming that the RCMP figured that the
25 Chief Council and whoever he took to the RCMP detachment

1 had told the family before they went.

2 So we didn't even know about it. So this is
3 something that really, really shocked us yesterday and was
4 very upsetting to find out that your Chief Councillor gave
5 assumptions to the RCMP that our sister had gone in the
6 river. To me, that's assuming that our sister went in the
7 river and drowned. And they never, ever told the family
8 that.

9 So when we're home tomorrow or whenever
10 we're done here, Roddy is going to go and talk to this
11 Chief Councillor, who is still alive; he's no longer Chief
12 Council but he is still around, and he's going to question
13 him about that and find out more information of why this
14 was brought to the RCMP and not to the family.

15 So, to me, that sounds like maybe that's why
16 they closed -- they stepped the search. We don't know. So
17 we'll get to the bottom of it ourselves. Like, Roddy'll
18 get to the bottom of this because that's his family, and
19 this is very serious.

20 This is very serious, why he did not
21 confront the family first before he went to the RCMP and
22 gave that information. So that's something that we learned
23 about the file that's in -- that was at the Hazelton
24 Detachment. But the good thing about it is the file is
25 open now and will remain open until she's found or

1 whatever.

2 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** I can't understand
3 what the RCMP were saying to us yesterday. They said that
4 the file had been closed in 1985, and then they come up
5 with a news clipping that the Chief Councillor had said at
6 the time back in '71.

7 So somebody's pulling our leg. They're
8 saying that the file is closed, and yet they have clippings
9 that come back from 1971. So I feel that the RCMP isn't
10 telling the full story when they talked to us and tell us
11 that the file has been closed. And I asked for a copy of
12 the file and they wouldn't give it to me.

13 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Were you allowed to
14 view the full file?

15 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Yes, he gave us the
16 one where Kenny had -- Kenny Russell had made a statement
17 that they seen footprints going into the river. And I
18 can't see it because the whole area is just rocks so you
19 can't leave footprints on the rocks unless you had muddy
20 feet, I guess. So I don't know what's happening there.

21 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** So were you able to
22 review any police officer's notes that were in the police
23 file to see how much weight they put on what was said by
24 that Band Councillor?

25 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** No. All we did was

1 read the information that was put on the file. We didn't
2 -- I didn't see the dates and times of when that was done.
3 I never even thought to check to see what ---

4 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Dates.

5 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** --- date was put on it
6 and who took the statement.

7 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Do you feel like you
8 had enough time and access to the file to get answers out
9 of that session, the answers that you would want?

10 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** No, we didn't. That's
11 why I asked for the file and they wouldn't give it to us.

12 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** As a matter of the
13 shocking information in the file, do you believe that you
14 were adequately prepared for what you were about to see in
15 that meeting?

16 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** No, we weren't.

17 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** So overall, how do you
18 feel about the meeting with the RCMP so close to the
19 hearing today?

20 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Well, I find it very
21 surprising that they contact us so close to the hearing,
22 and how they knew that we they were going to be part of the
23 hearing is -- we thought that you guys had cut the brain
24 and the Commissioner had contacted the RCMP to do that to
25 us and I found out later when I was talking to Breen that

1 he said, "No, it's not part of our job to do that." We
2 don't know how they did it.

3 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Okay. Thank you for
4 that. Can we take a five-minute break?

5 Thank you.

6 --- Upon recessing

7 --- Upon resuming

8 **RODDY SAMPARE, Resumed:**

9 **VIOLET SAMPARE, Resumed:**

10 **WINNIE SAMPARE, Resumed:**

11

12 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Roddy, would you let
13 the Chief Commissioner know what you hope will be the
14 outcome as a result of your testimony today?

15 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** There's a lot of
16 things that I kind of hope to see happen from this inquiry,
17 where they would have cell phone services right from Prince
18 George to Prince Rupert. There's a lot of dead areas.
19 There is cell phones along the way but there's a lot of
20 dead areas where people can be taken advantage of. Even if
21 they have cell phones, they can't call for help.

22 So I want to see the whole area right from
23 Prince George to Prince Rupert get cell service of some
24 kind.

25 And I know the transit is working on the bus

1 that comes from Prince George to Vancouver, I think. But
2 there should be one coming from Prince Rupert to Prince
3 George and connect with the other bus that's going on
4 further.

5 So I'd like to see the bus service, the bus
6 transit -- we have, in most of our communities in the
7 Hazelton area, and I don't know about Terrace and Prince
8 Rupert, but the Hazelton areas are mostly 99 percent
9 unemployed. And even today, I pick people up when they
10 have their little SA cheque because they can't afford to
11 get somebody to drive them into town to cash their cheque
12 and get a bit of groceries. Because living in the Reserve,
13 you get very little. You live in town, you get the maximum
14 amount of SA dollars that is awarded to people that are
15 living in town.

16 And Reserve, it's not like that. They get
17 100 and some odd dollars to live on in the month. And they
18 pretty well have to shoot moose and can fish to stay alive
19 in the summer months. If they don't do that they won't
20 make it through the year.

21 It's tough. We're discriminated on as
22 living on Reserve; it still happens today. I'd like to see
23 that -- our people get treated the same as the neighbouring
24 people where they can get full benefit that they can catch
25 a bus. I know some bus rides in our area is \$2 to go to

1 town, \$2 to come back, and they can't even afford that.
2 They have to hitchhike.

3 So something has to be done in the
4 communities. And there's no jobs. And I never, ever had
5 to depend on Welfare. I worked all my life. Back then it
6 was nice going and everybody was working. Now it's really
7 tough. And I feel for the people, my kids. My daughter
8 has to work at Smithers here. My other daughter, she's
9 trying to get a truck driving ticket. My son works in
10 Terrace in Graydon Security.

11 So we had to move our kids off the Reserve
12 in order to get educated. And they're feeling sorry
13 because they've lost their language and their tradition a
14 bit. My wife is trying to get them back on track, and our
15 little ones are learning.

16 But the main thing that I want to see --
17 it's not just for us, it's for everybody, even some of the
18 -- our neighbours in South Hazelton, they're hitchhiking
19 because they don't have enough money to get around, and
20 they're not first Nation. It's all race; all the race
21 that's living in the north. It's not like living in the
22 city where you bus runs every eight minutes or ten minutes.
23 You have a bus; lucky to get one bus a day; one in the
24 morning, one at night. They quit at 5:00, I think, 5:00 or
25 6:00 (inaudible) the bus quits running.

1 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** It only runs on certain
2 days.

3 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** And it runs on certain
4 days. (inaudible) usually gets two days, (inaudible) gets
5 two days. And it's a sad, sad affair that we have to live
6 in. We're still not people the way they looked at us. And
7 they're bringing in more people that they're treating
8 better than us. Thank Trump for that.

9 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Roddy, we've spoken on
10 the issue of what you would hope would come from your
11 testimony, and I just want to ask you also about cameras at
12 intersections.

13 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Yes, that's what my
14 wife was saying in her thing there that, you know, cameras
15 should be at intersections because a lot of the people that
16 stand to hitchhike, they stand in the light where the
17 intersection is. And if somebody's getting picked up at
18 least it'll be on the camera; not just in the Reserve but
19 in towns, just out of town there should be cameras.

20 Like, you see cameras now where they have
21 monitoring the highway when it's snow, and they have
22 cameras all over the place. They should do that to every
23 place where there's potential hitchhiking to be happening.

24 Now they have signs on the road saying it's
25 illegal to hitchhike but if they know what kind of reason

1 why they're hitchhiking, I don't know if they charge them
2 but...

3 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** I will now ask the
4 Chief Commissioner if she has any further questions.

5 **(SHORT PAUSE)**

6 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** I have a
7 couple of questions about the DNA samples that were taken.

8 Do you remember roughly when it was; what
9 year it was that they came to take those samples?

10 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Two thousand six
11 (2006) or '7 when the Pickton Farm was being dug up.

12 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** When the
13 police officers asked you for your DNA samples, did they
14 give you any indication of why they wanted your DNA
15 samples?

16 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** Well, the guy that
17 talked to me was -- he said there's a lot of DNA that's
18 bene collected at the farm and we -- and I said, yes, we
19 would ---

20 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** But they
21 didn't say, "We have" -- something along the lines of, "We
22 have reason to believe that your sister was at the Pickton
23 Farm and we'd like your DNA"?

24 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** No. He said that
25 there was just some DNA that they haven't been able to get

1 a hold of in their research that they were doing so they
2 asked if they would give -- if we'd give the DNA. So we
3 did, just in the case that our sister was one of them that
4 was there.

5 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Did they
6 tell you what would happen with her DNA; that they would
7 keep it private, or look after it so that it wouldn't be
8 used improperly?

9 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** No, he didn't. They
10 just took it, and we just kept hoping that something would
11 come out of it.

12 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** And I
13 just want to be sure on dates. Pardon me; I got so wrapped
14 up in what you were saying I can't find my notes now.

15 **(SHORT PAUSE)**

16 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** So you
17 heard from the RCMP just a few days ago, but how long was
18 it before then that you heard from them? I didn't phrase
19 that very well.

20 **(LAUGHTER)**

21 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** But
22 before you heard from them just in the last couple of days, when
23 was it that you heard from them?

24 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** When the Pickton Farm
25 was happening, was the last time we heard from any RCMP.

1 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Okay.

2 When you met with the RCMP officer just yesterday, did the
3 RCMP officer just show you the file or -- just open it up
4 to you? What happened?

5 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** Roddy asked for a copy
6 of the file, where it mentioned the statement that was done
7 by the Chief Council at the time and he just said that we
8 could not have -- I don't know if it was that copy that he
9 had or if we were privy to any of the copies on file. He
10 just said that we couldn't have that file.

11 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Okay.

12 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** So I'm not certain if
13 it's the paper he had on hand at the time or if we are not
14 allowed to have the file at all.

15 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Okay.

16 And so I'm just imagining the scene with the police
17 officer. Did he just -- or she, I suppose -- open up --
18 just open the file and say, "Here, this is the file that we
19 have"?

20 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** Yeah, when he asked for
21 that. He took it out of his binder and he -- because he
22 didn't want to read it again, he handed us a copy of -- he
23 handed us that piece of paper. He says, "You can read it
24 for yourself."

25 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** I see.

1 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** Because we questioned
2 him about, like, why weren't we given that information back
3 then that this man had gone with several other people -- we
4 don't know how many people but he said that there were
5 others that went with him to the RCMP detachment and gave
6 that information. So we asked why, at the time, that Chief
7 Councillor didn't go to the family and share that
8 information with them.

9 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Okay. I
10 understand.

11 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** So he just gave the
12 sheet and he says, "You read it right there," and that's
13 what we did.

14 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** I
15 understand now.

16 Thank you.

17 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** And we didn't know if
18 there was anything else in the file. All we were shown was
19 that one thing from Ken Russell.

20 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Thank you
21 very much.

22 Last word to -- well, last word to you. Is
23 there anything else that you'd like to tell us this
24 afternoon?

25 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** From this inquiry, I'm

1 -- I personally would like to see that a lot of the things
2 that were mentioned with all the hearings that I've
3 attended and heard family members talk about, and a lot of
4 it is repeated, but I'm hoping that -- to see some of those
5 things come to light, especially in regards to the
6 transportation, and also the surveillance in intersections.
7 Because -- and then this information that Greyhound may be
8 cutting their service to our area, like, Prince George to
9 Prince Rupert, that we're hearing that service is going to
10 be cut. I don't know if it's because the BC Transit now
11 has service, and it's only on certain days, once a day from
12 Smithers here to Prince George and we do have locally BC
13 Transit in the Hazeltons. We have the transit come to our
14 community but it doesn't go on to Kitwanga, which is the
15 next community, and then up north a bit to Gitanyow. Like,
16 we have the three western Gitsan areas and two of those
17 communities do not get the BC Transit.

18 So I'd like to see that extended to their
19 communities and also to extend the BC Transit all the way
20 down to Prince Rupert.

21 I think I'm feeling that is why Greyhound is
22 changing their service only to -- what are they called,
23 where they ---

24 **CHIEF RODDY SAMPARE:** (inaudible)

25 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** Yeah. You know, just

1 to -- and not for transportation.

2 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** M'hm.

3 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** We do have for health,
4 the health bus, the northern connections. We do utilize
5 that; some of the communities do utilize that and because
6 it's only for medical we cannot use it for public transit.
7 So the public transit should really look at extending their
8 service to Prince Rupert.

9 It's a beginning, and I know it may expand
10 and have more buses available. So that's something I would
11 like to see, is that BC Transit does extend their service
12 all the way to Prince Rupert, and to all the communities,
13 like, even up to the Nass River. There's communities up in
14 that area as well. They don't get transit but I know they
15 do provide some from their communities to Terrace, and
16 that's something we're not -- we don't have. Like, we just
17 don't have the funding to buy buses and hire drivers to
18 have community buses going in different places like
19 Smithers, Terrace, or Prince Rupert.

20 **MS. WINNIE SAMPARE:** I would like to see
21 that those that travel to travel in twos or threes, not by
22 yourself. It's dangerous.

23 **(SHORT PAUSE)**

24 **MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** The family is done.

25 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Okay.

1 Well, thank you all very much.

2 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** You're welcome.

3 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** I'm so
4 grateful that you were able to come today, and that we were
5 able to listen to your own language for a little bit, too.
6 That was lovely, thank you.

7 Because you've shared your important story
8 with us about your lost sister, we have some gifts for you.
9 I'll try not to trip or spill any water.

10 Everywhere we go we want to give families
11 and survivors a couple of little gifts. And the first one
12 is some seeds, and it's always local because we certainly
13 don't want to bring in foreign seeds. So we have some
14 fireweed seeds for you, and we know how resilient and tough
15 those plants are. And we hope that they give you some
16 strength as well. And please plant them and tell us what
17 happens, what grows. So I have those for you.

18 And I also have another gift from Haida
19 Gwaii. I'm going to ask you to help me with that.

20 When the matriarchs on Haida Gwaii learned
21 about the hearings here in Smithers, they directed some
22 people to go and collect eagle feathers to give to the
23 families and survivors, to comfort them, to give them
24 strength and courage, and just to acknowledge their loss as
25 well.

1 So this is a gift from the matriarchs on
2 Haida Gwaii in recognition and to honour your strength and
3 courage, and to recognize your loss. It's also from us,
4 for the same reasons; we're so very grateful that you're
5 here and that you shared your stories and your
6 recommendations with us. It's very important.

7 You've already made a difference so thank
8 you; and you've changed me. Thank you very much.

9 And I think we'll just stop for a little bit
10 because we have to set up for the next family. Okay?

11 Thank you.

12 **MS. VIOLET SAMPARE:** Thank you.

13 **--- Exhibits (code: P1P020206)**

14 **Exhibit 1:** Black and white copy of photo of Jean
15 Virginia Sampare (high school photo) on 8.5
16 x 11 inch paper.

17 **Exhibit 2:** Black and white copy of photo of Jean
18 Virginia Sampare on 8.5 x 11 inch paper.

19 **Exhibit 3:** Newspaper article entitled "Search continues
20 for girl" (undated / no publication
21 information).

22 **Exhibit 4:** Newspaper article entitled "Search called
23 off" (undated / no publication information).

24 --- Upon recessing at 15:05

25 --- Upon resuming at 15:25

1 **Hearing # 7**

2 **Witness: Rachelle Wilson**

3 **In relation to Ramona Wilson**

4 **Heard by Chief Commissioner Marion Buller**

5 **Commission Counsel: Joseph Murdoch-Flowers**

6 **Clerk: Gladys Wraight, Registrar: Bryan Zandberg**

7 **JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Chief Commissioner,

8 I have the honour today of working with Rachelle Wilson,
9 who is coming before the Inquiry to speak of the
10 disappearance of her cousin, Ramona Wilson, in 1994.

11 I understand that Rachelle will be beginning
12 with a song which, for the purposes of the Inquiry and the
13 oath or affirmation, I ask satisfies the requirements of
14 the oath or affirmation.

15 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Yes, it
16 does.

17 **JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Thank you.

18 And after that, Commissioner, I expect
19 Rachelle to launch into her story and to share with us her
20 story.

21 So with that, I'll just pass the microphone
22 over.

23 And I should also acknowledge, Commissioner,
24 that there's a number of support people here as well.
25 Perhaps I'll leave you to introduce them.

1 **MS. RACHELLE WILSON:** Good afternoon,
2 Commissioner. This is my cousin, Brenda. She's the older
3 sister of Ramona Wilson.

4 Just to give you a little update that we
5 have had two deaths in our family, one in Prince George of
6 our 22 year old cousin, and our uncle that just passed on
7 Saturday. So these two deaths have affected our family.

8 Brenda and my aunt were supposed to speak
9 and I was supposed to be the support person, but because
10 this has been devastating having two losses in our family,
11 they had to step back. And as a support person, I wanted
12 to support them.

13 I was asked to be a witness, so I've gone
14 through the process in July for the interview, so I've
15 stepped forward as the witness to speak on behalf of Ramona
16 Wilson's family.

17 So right now, we are Gitxsan, and that's
18 where Ramona comes from, from the Gitxsan Nation. And we
19 belong to the Wolf Clan. And I am one of the Wing Chiefs
20 of our house.

21 My Gitxsan name is Simkanosen (phon).
22 Simkanosen is the Wing Chief and the medicine woman name
23 that carried down from my grandmother, Maggie, to my
24 mother, Alison, and to me. So the song that I'm going to
25 sing is very ancient song of our house, and we call it our

1 limkholi (phon). Our limkholi is a morning song.

2 So the reason why I chose to open up and to
3 swear that I'm telling the truth is that, in our law, that
4 when somebody passes on to the spirit world is that we have
5 to set their spirit free. And through this song today, we
6 are going to set Winona's spirit free 'cause we have gone
7 through this for 23 years since she has gone missing on
8 June 11th, 1994.

9 We have honoured her all the years, but I
10 feel, Commissioner, that we have hung on to her, that we
11 need to let her spirit free.

12 So this song is our ancient family song, and
13 I'm going to stand before you to swear in that I'm telling
14 the truth and I'm going to sing our spirit song, our
15 mourning song.

16 --- **OPENING SONG**

17 **MS. RACHELLE WILSON:** That song that I just
18 sang is (Native language) and it was a ceremony of letting
19 Ramona's spirit free.

20 And we've been very selfish the last 23
21 years to -- it felt like we were hanging on to Ramona. But
22 Ramona was taken from us on June 11th, 1994.

23 And that evening, before she went missing,
24 she had dinner with her mother, Matilda Wilson, my aunt.
25 And she told her mom that she was going to see some friends

1 and her boyfriend at the time, who lived in Moricetown.

2 And on June 11th, that was the weekend of
3 the grad in Smithers, graduation. And Ramona left that
4 evening.

5 And the next day, Ramona didn't come home.
6 And my aunt started getting worried, and she called my
7 mother, Alice, her sister. We live in Hazelton.

8 She called my mom and she said that she was
9 worried 'cause her baby girl didn't come home. Ramona was
10 16 years old.

11 And so my mom was feeling really distraught
12 and told us that we had to go to Smithers to go see our
13 aunt and to try to help look for Ramona. And so our whole
14 family came to Smithers, and we all gathered together.

15 And in the meantime, my Aunt Matilda was
16 phoning all over. She was phoning all of Ramona's friends
17 to ask if they had seen her, and nobody seemed to know
18 where or -- where her whereabouts were.

19 And we knew that it was out of character for
20 Ramona to go missing. We all became very concerned.

21 I asked my aunt if she had called the RCMP,
22 and they told my aunt that they had to wait 24 hours, which
23 I thought was pretty precious time in that 24 hours. I
24 felt that if the RCMP would have responded in that 24
25 hours, who knows if we would have found her alive. That's

1 always a question that our family has always asked.

2 A week gone by, and still the RCMP did not
3 do nothing. So all our friends and family from Moricetown,
4 the search and rescue, they were friends of Matilda's. And
5 they stepped and came to Smithers to say they would help
6 search for Ramona.

7 So that whole week, family and friends were
8 searching for Ramona. But in the meantime, we didn't know
9 why the RCMP didn't respond. And we didn't understand why
10 it seemed like nobody was listening to us, our family.

11 Like we tried to get missing posters. And
12 our family didn't know where to go to access service to get
13 help for missing posters or anything. And my uncle, Frank
14 Sampson, is an artist, an Indian artist. And he had
15 painted some -- some of his artwork.

16 And my cousin, Brenda, did bead work. And
17 my aunt also did bead work, but she also baked and cooked.

18 So we had to raise money on our own to try
19 to get money, reward money. And it felt really
20 heartbreaking because we had to stand in the mall with
21 Ramona's picture trying to ask people in public that if
22 they ever saw her or if they seen her around.

23 So we tried to have bake sales. We tried to
24 sell jewellery. We tried everything to raise money, and
25 the money was very little.

1 It seemed like we didn't have any support.
2 Even trying to get the media, like the interior news or any
3 kind of radio station, somebody to hear us, but our family
4 had to chase after the media to say, "Hey, wait a minute.
5 You guys have to listen to us because our family member's
6 gone missing".

7 And it seemed like it was just dead ends
8 everywhere trying to look for Ramona.

9 Two weeks of searching and looking. And
10 during that time, for myself, the last time I had seen
11 Ramona was probably a week before she went missing.

12 And Ramona was a 16 year old that was in
13 high school, and she was very brilliant. She wrote poetry.
14 She did very well in school, and her dream was to become a
15 psychologist. She wanted to help children and families and
16 be a psychologist.

17 She was very good at her writing, and she
18 had poems that she wrote, and very artistic in her words.

19 So she's the youngest of my aunt's children.
20 She's -- my aunt has six children, and Ramona was the baby.

21 They lived on Railway Avenue in Smithers,
22 and she had older sister here, Brenda, and her brothers and
23 her being the baby girl.

24 Ramona was very strong in her words and what
25 she said. And today I often think as I sit here as a Wing

1 Chief and a matriarch of our house, I often wonder what
2 Ramona would have become because of her strength.

3 Unfortunately, days have gone by and we
4 couldn't find Ramona. And I remember sitting at home, I
5 was pregnant with my youngest son, but I -- last time I had
6 seen Ramona, she was sitting at Mr. Mike's -- what they
7 used to call Mr. Mike's. It's now a steakhouse on Main.
8 And she was a waitress at Smitty's restaurant.

9 And we had dinner and we saw her at the Mr.
10 Mike's restaurant. And she was rubbing my tummy and asking
11 me when I was having my baby. And I told her November.

12 And she said she couldn't wait to meet my
13 baby. And I was teasing her and I was telling her that I
14 couldn't wait to go over to Smitty's so she could serve me
15 as a waitress. And I told her I was going to harass and
16 really tease her.

17 And she giggled and she says, "You better
18 not", she said to me. And I laughed and we parted our
19 ways. But that was the last time I had seen Ramona alive.

20 To have our family and friends from
21 Moricetown searching for her, our family went out. And I
22 don't know why night time was the worst 'cause I didn't
23 know where she was. And as an Aboriginal woman, I felt
24 really unsafe.

25 I felt that whoever murdered her was -- was

1 watching us search for her. And I felt that -- as an
2 Aboriginal woman, I felt fearful that I would be murdered
3 next or -- I had nightmares about being murdered and trying
4 to get away.

5 The trauma of our spirit, worried about who
6 was going to be next, just having night terrors about
7 Ramona being murdered, where she'd be, is she cold laying
8 somewhere. Does anybody care in this community? Do the
9 RCMP care? Does the media care? Is there anybody out
10 there that knows what it's like to just sit back and feel
11 so helpless, the helpless feeling of feeling so alone even
12 though there were people standing forward and searching for
13 her?

14 I think in the wintertime and the fall time
15 that came, we were so lonely and we tried to keep each
16 other's spirit up. But Ramona was always on our mind
17 through Christmas holidays.

18 I remember my mom and my auntie lighting
19 candles and praying that she would come home. The trauma
20 of our spirits and our family was so broken.

21 I was sharing with our family today that the
22 alcoholism in our family increased, the pain was so great.

23 She went missing June 11th, 1994, and then
24 10 months later, there were two young men that were on an
25 ATV just outside of Smithers, by Yelich Road, just behind

1 the airport in a wooded bush. They were looking for -- I
2 guess they got their ATV stuck in the mud and they were
3 looking for a stick or something to try to pry their ATV
4 out of the mud. And they came across remains.

5 We -- of course, again, we didn't -- we
6 didn't hear from the RCMP. We just heard through the word
7 of people saying there was remains found. But one of the
8 things that I really want to stress was when the RCMP were
9 contacted, why didn't they take our family serious?

10 And the other thing is that I think what
11 should have happened -- because what was happening was the
12 RCMP had so many different people taking on the case there
13 was not one solid RCMP to actually -- actually communicate
14 with us. It was us chasing after the RCMP and asking
15 questions.

16 Same with the media. Where I felt that we
17 should have had a person like an Aboriginal liaison RCMP or
18 somebody that could be more sensitive to our Gitxsan
19 culture so that we wouldn't have to feel that we were just
20 harassing people to try to get any information, 'cause
21 that's how it felt.

22 I felt that we were just a thorn in the
23 RCMP's side for asking questions in regards to our loved
24 one missing.

25 So these two young boys found these remains,

1 and we weren't really contacted by the RCMP. We weren't
2 told, but my aunt phoned my mother and said that remains
3 were found and that we had to prepare ourselves just in
4 case it was Ramona.

5 It didn't come from the RCMP because they
6 never really seemed to talk to us. We had to talk to them.

7 There was quite the process when Ramona's
8 remains were found. We were told that we had to be
9 prepared for what was -- whatever was to come. But all
10 they could tell us that the remains have been sent to
11 Vancouver to forensics.

12 We weren't told whether it was a suspicion
13 that it was Ramona.

14 So we -- they found her remains in April of
15 1995, and that was 10 months after she went missing. And
16 when they found the remains, they said they were sending it
17 to Vancouver.

18 And I remember our family having a family
19 dinner, and it was just around Easter time, in April. And
20 I remember the stress of all sitting in a circle trying to
21 have an Easter dinner and crying and breaking down because
22 we didn't know if it was Ramona. All my aunties and uncles
23 and my cousins were all very sombre sitting there waiting.

24 And about three weeks later, the RCMP
25 contacted my aunt and told her that the remains have been

1 brought back to Smithers and that she would have to come
2 and identify to see if it was Ramona.

3 And I remember going to the police station
4 from Hazelton driving here to stop off at my aunt's, and we
5 were all told to meet at the Smithers RCMP detachment.

6 And I remember that there was three people
7 selected to go in, and there was my mom Alice, my Aunt
8 Matilda and my Uncle Frank, and Brenda.

9 And we were waiting outside, and we have a
10 really large family. But the thing that I had felt was --
11 they went in to identify her. There were no counsellors.
12 There was no support. We were left outside.

13 And all I could remember was my Aunt Matilda
14 and my mom and my uncle and my cousin, Brenda, all coming
15 out screaming. And all I could hear my aunt screaming is
16 "My baby. That's my baby".

17 And our whole family -- our whole family was
18 just screaming and crying.

19 I thought how insensitive. Where is --
20 where is the support? Why did we have to be standing
21 outside? Why didn't we have any counsellors on hand? Why
22 didn't we have an RCMP to -- to give us some sort of word
23 or comfort or something? Everything seemed handled so
24 insensitive to our -- our culture.

25 We were to identify Ramona and then to plan

1 her funeral, something that took a real big toll on our
2 family.

3 Who would have murdered her, and why? Why?

4 Why didn't we get that support? We didn't
5 have the police to rely on and we didn't have any support.
6 The process was so painful just feeling so unprotected.

7 I felt like whoever murdered Ramona is still
8 out there. Whoever murdered Ramona could be watching us.

9 The RCMP knew that we were planning Ramona's
10 funeral, and one cop came over and said to us, "When you
11 guys go plan her funeral, we will be at the funeral but we
12 want you to watch out for any suspicious behaviour.
13 Anything that -- you look at anybody in the crowd and if
14 they're acting suspicious, let us know".

15 I thought again how could -- how could they
16 say that when we were grieving. I couldn't even see
17 through my tears.

18 I looked around and I just -- just felt like
19 I couldn't even live. I'm pretty sure that 95 percent of
20 our family didn't want to live through this.

21 The guilt of having to be alive when our
22 loved one was taken, this has plagued our family for a long
23 time. We feel guilty because we're still alive and she was
24 taken at 16 years old.

25 I need some Kleenex.

1 So we planned Ramona's funeral. Ramona had
2 many friends in Smithers. She attended school here, so we
3 thought, to ease the pain of our aunt, that we would allow
4 Ramona to be buried in Smithers and not take her home to
5 Gitanmaax to have a ceremonial Gitxsan funeral. We thought
6 that because of our aunt living here and the many friends
7 and her home here that she made in Smithers that we would
8 take Ramona home one day to Gitanmaax and then to bring her
9 remains to lay her to rest in Smithers.

10 So there were so many things that we had to
11 do. I remember preparing for everything. It was just a
12 time of chaos and a time of anger, a time of tears.
13 Sometimes I wondered when it was ever going to ease up
14 'cause I could think about all the fundraising our family
15 had to do alone, not feeling like we had support or anyone
16 to really talk to. Just drowning ourselves in sorrow.

17 And the day of the funeral for Ramona came,
18 so we brought her remains to the St. Joseph's church over
19 here. And when we brought her there, it was our immediate
20 family.

21 And I think that's when our spirits left
22 'cause I was never the same and neither was my aunt,
23 neither was my cousin, and my other cousins, her brothers.

24 The trauma of going to her funeral and
25 wanting to open her casket but knowing that it was just her

1 remains was very hard, to try to accommodate what was
2 happening and trying to work through everything.

3 Coming out of the church, the -- I guess the
4 tears that were coming through was -- were so great, but
5 when we finally got Ramona's remains into the vehicle as we
6 were heading to the graveyard, we were heading on to Main
7 Street to make our way to the Smithers cemetery and there
8 was a lot of RCMP around, and I wondered why.

9 Why now are they all around now that
10 Ramona's remains are going to be buried? Where were they
11 when we needed it?

12 And they're the ones that are supposed to be
13 vigilant and looking after the public. We shouldn't have
14 had to worry about suspicious behaviours or anything
15 because, like I said, we couldn't even see through our
16 tears, let alone anyone that had suspicious behaviour.

17 So when we brought Ramona up to the
18 graveyard, you think nobody cares. You think you're alone.
19 But there were hundreds of people standing all along the
20 Main Street.

21 So many people probably thought about us but
22 were scared to come forward.

23 There were so many people right from Main
24 Street all the way down to the graveyard, people, strangers
25 and people sending cards and giving us things. It just

1 seemed so overwhelming because for those 10 months of not
2 knowing.

3 I really don't remember going to Ramona's
4 grave and burying her remains. I don't remember that part
5 because it was too traumatic.

6 There were a lot of people that came forward
7 after, and my aunt -- my aunt said, "There's people sending
8 sympathy cards that I don't even know, but I must thank
9 them".

10 So in our culture, after we do the burial,
11 we usually go to the area that person died. And as a
12 medicine person, as a Chief, as a person to stand up for
13 your family, we had to go to that area where they had found
14 Ramona, which was that Yelich Road.

15 So there was myself, my mom, my aunties.
16 There was two of my aunties, Esther, Matilda. And the
17 purpose of us that we were going to go to the area after
18 the funeral to bless the area, our ceremonial purpose is to
19 brush the area and to cleanse the area where her life was
20 taken or where they laid her to rest.

21 So we were told that we couldn't go there
22 because of the investigation the first time, and we were
23 told that the forensic team from Vancouver was there. And
24 they had a sister there, so we couldn't go there.

25 So this was after that fact that they said

1 that they had did their investigation and they were
2 finished.

3 So we went to that area. And where that
4 area is, you go down Yelich Road and you turn to your left
5 and there's a big field there. But in that big field,
6 there's a little walking place on your left-hand side. And
7 my auntie said she knew where the area was where they found
8 Ramona so that we would head to that area.

9 So there was all women that were walking the
10 trail to get to where they found Ramona's remains.

11 And I remember walking with my aunties and
12 my mom, and I remember saying, "Mom, I don't know why I
13 feel this way, but I feel like that murderer's in the bush.
14 He's watching us, and I'm scared. I don't feel safe here.
15 I don't feel like this is the time we should be doing this.
16 I think we need to let people know where we're at and have
17 some men with us".

18 And my aunt said, "Well, I'm going to call
19 my son and his friend, and then we'll come back and do
20 this".

21 And I said, "Well, we're already pretty well
22 here", I said. "But just keep an eye out in the bushes".
23 I said, "Make sure you're vigilant about who's around and
24 what's around". I said, "I don't know why I feel so
25 fearful like we're being watched".

1 And we got to the area, and I was talking to
2 my aunt. And I said to my aunt, "What did the police ever
3 tell you about where she was laying and how she was
4 laying?" Because there was this big tree -- as you end the
5 trail, there was this big tree and it had branches. And
6 the branches that was like this was sort of like a little
7 fort. And the area under the tree was all clear, and then
8 they laid Ramona's body right here under the tree so
9 perfectly aligned.

10 And all they told us was that they found
11 Ramona's -- some of Ramona's belongings folded very nicely
12 and her body lay naked. That's all we were told.

13 And we also were told that her shoes weren't
14 around anywhere. Her shoes were never found.

15 So I was fearful when I went there, and I
16 was very distraught. And so when I got there, I could only
17 imagine my cousin laying there for months as we all
18 searched for her.

19 I thought how inhumane, how anybody could
20 murder someone and just leave them laying there as we
21 searched so hard and we prayed for a good outcome.

22 I was so distraught I fell to my knees and I
23 just started crying. I took -- as I was on my knees, I
24 just took the soil and I grabbed it and I was just hanging
25 on like God, why? Why? Why did our cousin have to die

1 like this? God, please help us through this because this
2 is just killing us.

3 My aunties surrounded me and I just looked
4 up and I was crying so hard. And I opened my hands, I
5 looked at the soil, and I said, "This is what you laid on
6 my baby".

7 I opened my hands to let some of the soil
8 fall through and what I saw was hair and pieces of cloth.
9 I stopped crying. I looked at it. I was like "This is
10 hair in the soil. What is going on? There's hair in there
11 and there's bits of -- of clothing, of fabric".

12 It was purple, purple fabric.

13 I screamed really loud. I said, "This is
14 the investigation? This is their investigation and there's
15 hair? What if this is the murderer's hair? Whose clothing
16 is this?" that I screamed out.

17 And my aunt said, "It looks like Ramona's
18 purple jeans. She was wearing purple jeans".

19 I said, "I'm really upset. I want to go to
20 the RCMP now". I said, "Get me an envelope so I could put
21 this hair and this fabric and this -- this evidence, more
22 or less, into an envelope and let's go back to the RCMP and
23 ask again. If they said they did a thorough investigation
24 and that they had done their part, then why is this hair
25 and stuff here?"

1 I said, "This could be the murderer's hair
2 and this clothing is Ramona's". And I said, "It really
3 bothers me and I'm pissed off".

4 So we drove out of that area and we headed
5 out and we went to the RCMP detachment.

6 And me and my aunt walked in and I took the
7 envelope from my aunt and I looked at her and I asked if we
8 could speak to the RCMP to turn in some evidence of where
9 Ramona Wilson's body was laying.

10 And the person that was there said there was
11 no RCMP and they'd get an RCMP to call me, and they just
12 took the envelope like it was no big deal that we found
13 Ramona's -- some evidence where Ramona was laying.

14 We never did speak to the RCMP. They just
15 took the envelope.

16 And I went home and I remember driving home,
17 and I was crying. I said, "Man", I said to myself, "if I
18 don't hear back from the RCMP, I'm just going to keep
19 bugging them. I'm going to keep phoning them every day
20 until I get some sort of response if they don't respond.
21 I've had enough".

22 Thankfully, one of the RCMP contacted me the
23 next day by phone and they said that they understood that I
24 had brought an envelope where Ramona Wilson's body was
25 laying.

1 And I -- I agreed and I said, "Yes. And I'm
2 wondering if this thorough investigation of Ramona's laying
3 there and you guys doing the investigation of why there
4 would be still hair and why there would still be fabric
5 there and I'm wondering what you guys are going to do with
6 this hair and what the procedure is if you find any
7 evidence".

8 And they said, "You'll have to report to the
9 RCMP first thing tomorrow morning and there'll be an RCMP
10 to escort you out to that area".

11 So I did exactly that. The next morning, I
12 got up, I went and drove to Smithers. I drove to the RCMP,
13 and I went to meet an RCMP. And then there was two of
14 them.

15 There was them escorting me out to Yelich
16 Road to where they found Ramona's body.

17 And I remember walking back out there
18 feeling again just like "What am I doing? Why am I having
19 to go through this? Why is this happening?"

20 And they took me to that area and they had
21 these little yellow cards with numbers on them. And the
22 RCMP said, "Ma'am, is this where Ramona Wilson's body was
23 laying?" And I said yes.

24 "And can you tell me what happened?" And I
25 said yes, and I told him what I just finished telling you,

1 is that her body was laying there and that the -- they
2 found her remains and we've done the funeral and were going
3 to bless the area and that I got very upset and I fell to
4 the ground. And I grabbed some dirt and I was crying, and
5 that's when I found Ramona's hair and bits of her clothing.

6 Well, that's what I assumed, but I wasn't
7 quite sure, but my aunt said that it was her jeans that she
8 was wearing.

9 So they told me to kneel down and to point
10 to the -- where I grabbed the soil. And where I grabbed
11 that soil, you could still see where I grabbed -- the
12 imprint of where I grabbed the soil from.

13 So I pointed it out and I pointed to where I
14 was kneeling. And they just put numbers by the area that I
15 had found these things.

16 But the thing that I think is really
17 important here is that we were switched from cop to RCMP,
18 from RCMP. And they never, ever got back to us.

19 Neither did forensics. They never got back
20 to us.

21 We were never given cause of death of our
22 cousin, Ramona. We were never told by forensics. I
23 thought that my mom and aunt didn't want to tell me because
24 I thought they were trying to protect me from any kind of
25 pain, but I directly asked my aunt. I asked my Aunt

1 Matilda, "How did Ramona die?"

2 And she looked at me and she said, "I can't
3 tell you that 'cause I don't know. I was never given
4 anything".

5 So back when Ramona died, there was no Itana
6 (phon). The RCMP in the north probably weren't even
7 prepared to how to deal with a crime scene or how to deal
8 with a murder.

9 I felt that everything that was done was
10 done in a manner where there was just rookies that did not
11 know how to do the investigation or they did not know the
12 procedures because of all the stuff being in the north.

13 I mean, you -- at that time, there was a
14 death in Vancouver. The Vancouver police department --
15 when Melanie Carpenter went missing, she was already found
16 even though she had passed and they found her body right
17 away. The investigation was done.

18 In reality, why wasn't that done for our
19 family? Why wasn't it done properly? And that's something
20 that we'll have to ask questions and advocate for, that if
21 someone ever goes missing and murdered, why is there not an
22 alert?

23 There needs to be things put in the system
24 where don't wait the 24 hours for someone when they go
25 missing. Take them serious and listen right away. Have an

1 Aboriginal liaison officer so that they can listen to you.

2 Don't wait for a week before you act on it.

3 A week later, they were checking her bank statements to see
4 if there was any bank activity. There wasn't.

5 We knew it was out of character. They
6 thought that she was a 16 year old runaway, and we knew
7 that she wasn't a runaway. We knew that Ramona would be up
8 front and let us know if she was with a friend or
9 something.

10 There are so many things that I could say
11 that I would like to see changed, is our culture. Our
12 culture is important to us.

13 Aboriginal women are not disposable.
14 Aboriginal women have strength. And I'm going to speak
15 that and I'm going to let Canada know and British Columbia
16 know that we are not disposable. Women, we're at risk.

17 The Aboriginal women that have been murdered
18 along Highway 16, why have we normalized that when we know
19 that there's terrible people out there that are murdering
20 women?

21 I don't want Ramona's life just to be a
22 statistic. I want changes in Canada and British Columbia
23 so that I can grow old and that I could say that I did my
24 job that I felt that I needed to do for my family.

25 I just feel that -- I hope and I pray that

1 there are changes made so that our family -- and there are
2 other families, if their loved one's going missing, that
3 it's taken seriously so that you don't have to chase after
4 the media or the RCMP to get any help or support from them,
5 because Ramona's life mattered. It mattered to us.

6 There are -- those are the things that I
7 have thought of of 23 years. There's got to be changes
8 made so that other family members don't have to endure the
9 trauma we have endured.

10 There's effects in our family from this
11 death that maybe one day when we see the results of this
12 missing and murdered National Inquiry that I hope that we
13 could find some peace.

14 That's all I want in my life, is peace. I
15 want to be okay with what I said today and I want to honour
16 Ramona and Ramona's life because we loved her very much,
17 and she's very dearly missed.

18 You could see up on the wall that she was
19 our Gitxsan princess, and she'll live on through us. And I
20 know that.

21 From the time she went missing in '94 to the
22 time now where I've just come full circle to be a
23 grandmother, and I'm doing this in honour of all my
24 grandchildren and grandchildren yet to be born. And I hope
25 that this Inquiry comes with good results.

1 Thank you. Thank you for listening.

2 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCK-FLOWERS:** You talked
3 about changes that you want to see, and you mentioned some
4 of the recommendations that you have like having perhaps a
5 point person within the RCMP who is on a missing persons
6 file or a murder file.

7 You also talked about the difficulty you had
8 in coordinating resources for publicizing her disappearance
9 and so on.

10 **MS. RACHELLE WILSON:** M'hm.

11 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCK-FLOWERS:** Do you have any
12 recommendations about how these resources might be
13 available in the future for anyone else who unfortunately
14 faces the same situation that your family faced?

15 **MS. RACHELLE WILSON:** Yes.

16 I'm a nurse and, as you know, nurses do care
17 plans. And my idea was that if someone were to go missing
18 that the RCMP have an Aboriginal liaison to do the work as
19 well as having a person in the RCMP detachment to help
20 navigate -- navigate what the process is, that there is a
21 place you can go to get help for the missing and murdered
22 or missing, and how to access reward money, how to access
23 services for mental health, to find that support within
24 your own circle with your community.

25 I felt that there's got to be some

1 navigation through this whole process, not all the chaos
2 and feeling at loss and feeling you're alone.

3 And as so many families have said,
4 transportation. Transportation -- we did not have bus
5 services. And then the other day, as I was listening to
6 the radio, they said Greyhound bus service is cutting their
7 services in the north. And then they put the medical bus,
8 but you have to be medically sick to catch that bus, so
9 you're out of luck there.

10 And then they started this new bus, but it
11 only runs on those certain days.

12 You're still seeing young women hitchhiking
13 because the bus services is very slim that you're going to
14 -- when you need it that it's not going to be there, so
15 there's got to be that put into place.

16 But I also think that there's got to be some
17 sort of alert, you know, what kind of -- how are we going
18 to alert? Because you know what; I think within that 24
19 hours when someone goes missing that time is of the
20 essence, that there's got to be an alert put into place so
21 that the RCMP will say yes, we'll act on it, yes, we'll
22 look for them and yes, we'll have more result in bringing
23 that person home alive. Not wait 10 months like we've had
24 to.

25 There's just -- like there's just so many

1 things that I think all those little details of navigating
2 -- this is where I'm going to go. I'm going to the RCMP
3 and hopefully the RCMP will believe you and they will help
4 you.

5 But to have an Aboriginal liaison RCMP to
6 stay on your case and be that bridge between the two
7 cultures because there is the thing called systemic racism
8 that, unfortunately, has happened to us.

9 When nobody believes you, it's a really hard
10 angry thing, you know. Like I don't even know how the RCMP
11 handled us. It was more or less being ignored. So there's
12 got to be an Aboriginal liaison person that would bridge
13 the gap between the two -- the native and the non-native
14 because I work in the health care system and I work for
15 Northern Health. We have an Aboriginal liaison that helps
16 people in the hospital.

17 That needs to be put in place with the RCMP.

18 Also, the RCMP need to really take seriously
19 that their word against ours is that they need to have
20 cultural sensitivity. They need to learn when they come
21 into a native community that they need to learn about the
22 cultures and respect our cultures because there has been no
23 respect. And I feel I'm going to speak the truth today
24 saying that because that happened to us.

25 It was really hard watching my auntie and my

1 cousins and trying to fundraise.

2 At a dance to raise reward money -- we did a
3 fundraiser for Ramona to raise money. We did a dance. And
4 that turned out a flop.

5 We did everything to try to uplift ourselves
6 but, you know what, that shouldn't have ever happened. We
7 should have been told off the bat that you can access this.

8 There are services in the community that
9 need to be created to say if this person has gone missing,
10 this is what you need to do 'cause you're not thinking
11 straight. You're first going to report it to the RCMP and
12 if the RCMP don't believe you, then you're going to need
13 money to fundraise and we'll start you off and help you
14 with posters and then you go to Missing to apply for a
15 reward. And then over here, we have our counselling
16 services and there's the psychologist that could help you
17 through your grief and trauma.

18 But alcohol in the family has taken place
19 because of the trauma, and our spirits were very broken and
20 has been broken for a very long time.

21 I would have liked to guide my aunt and say,
22 "Auntie, can you please come with me and there's accessing
23 services over here and we can get you some help" because
24 the trauma is so great. I would not wish it upon anybody.

25 I'm not only talking about my aunt being

1 traumatized. I'm talking about my cousins. I'm talking
2 about my aunties, my uncles, the children of Brenda, the
3 grandchildren and how they handled it because, you know
4 what, they watched us. They watched us go through hell.

5 So it rippled down right from Ramona being
6 murdered to all my aunties and uncles, to Matilda, to
7 Matilda's children. All the children, the grandchildren.
8 It rippled right out to our whole entire family.

9 And you know what; that's a really bad way
10 to be.

11 Right now -- when I spoke today, I prayed
12 that our family would feel the ripple effect of us healing
13 and us speaking out and us telling the truth of what really
14 happened so that we could come together as a family and
15 feel that ripple effect of healing because it's been a long
16 time coming.

17 There is many deep layers, really deep-
18 rooted dysfunctional behaviour in our family because of the
19 trauma. And I could only pray for healing.

20 That's something I think that's really
21 important for our family to go through. We have a ceremony
22 to do after this process is over to start really digging in
23 and really pulling out the stuff because I must tell you,
24 in preparing for today, for two weeks I've been just in
25 excruciating pain.

1 I had to have a counsellor come in to my
2 office twice in one week. It's either that or my life is
3 done because I was very, very suicidal. I felt this deep-
4 rooted feeling of just letting go.

5 My sister came home in 1996 or 1995 after we
6 buried Ramona, and she went back to Vancouver and she
7 committed suicide. And we didn't understand why.

8 We -- at that time, we were all very sick in
9 our own spirit, and I often wonder today if my sister
10 committed suicide because she couldn't cope with the death
11 and the murder of our cousin.

12 It's very keeping a close eye on my aunt,
13 always trying to make her live so that she doesn't harm
14 herself. There's so many times we had to talk on the phone
15 so that she wouldn't harm herself, and it's been really
16 hard to watch my cousins and all of her family going
17 through this trauma.

18 But I would like to make those
19 recommendations in regards to building this gap and
20 bridging the RCMP and have a navigator to help you through.
21 Maybe that navigator could come through the Missing.

22 If they know that the RCMP have contacted
23 them and say "We have a family here that has lost a -- a
24 missing or murdered loved one" that that person can step
25 forward and say, "We'll help you".

1 This is the steps that we need to do in
2 order to get the money for reward money 'cause we didn't
3 know that. We were trying to fundraise on our own, and
4 that was really pathetic. It was hard. It was
5 frustrating. It was excruciating trying to put our monies
6 together and start a little pot so that we could at least
7 get missing posters.

8 There was a disassociation that happened
9 when Ramona went missing. We knew her as Ramona, our
10 cousin, and Ramona, our sister, and Ramona, my daughter,
11 but when her poster went up in town it was -- that felt to
12 me like that -- looking at her picture, it made me think
13 that this can't be happening and this isn't -- this isn't
14 our family. This is not happening to us.

15 And people would stop and look at her
16 picture and walk, and I would walk around Smithers. And I
17 remember thinking, "I hate looking at these pictures. I
18 can't believe this is happening. This is not what I
19 wanted" so that I became dissociated with who Ramona was.

20 And in the last few years, I had to do a lot
21 of healing work to connect with Ramona's spirit and
22 remember who she truly was and who she was to become. And
23 I really hope that a lot of the changes come forward and
24 that we could see -- see the results.

25 That's all I want to see.

1 Is there any other questions?

2 **MR. JOSEPH MURDOCK-FLOWERS:** Not from me. I
3 just want to say thank you. Thank you for sharing.

4 I have no questions, Commissioner.

5 **CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** I don't
6 have any, either.

7 Thank you.

8 --- Upon adjourning at 16:24

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LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

14

15 I, Marie Rainville, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that

16 I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and

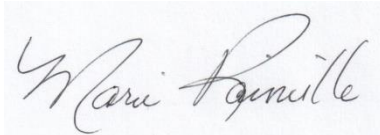
17 accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this

18 matter.

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Marie Rainville

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October 3, 2017

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