

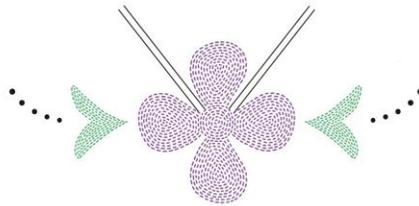
National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



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
Membertou Trade & Convention Centre, Jenu Room**

Membertou, Nova Scotia



PUBLIC

Wednesday November 1, 2017

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**Robert Pictou Sr, Francis Pictou, Robert Pictou Jr, Agnes Gould
& Marie Pictou, In relation to Virginia Sue Pictou Noyes;**

Vanessa Brooks, In relation to Tanya Brooks

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APPEARANCES

Note: For the purpose of establishing this record of attendance, counsel are considered present whether they attended one or all of the public hearings held over the course of the day at the Membertou Trade and Convention Centre - Jenu Room (i.e. the main public hearing space on this day).

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Non-appearance

Eastern Door Indigenous Women's
Association

Non-appearance

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Commission Counsel: Jennifer Cox	
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1 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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In relation to Virginia Sue Pictou Noyes

1 Membertou, Nova Scotia

2 --- Upon commencing on Wednesday, November 1, 2017, at 9:18
3 a.m.

4 **HEARING # 1**

5 **Witnesses: Robert Pictou Sr, Francis Pictou, Robert Pictou**
6 **Jr, Agnes Gould and Marie Pictou**
7 **(In Relation to Virginia Sue Pictou Noyes)**

8 **Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette**

9 **Commission Counsel: Jennifer Cox**

10 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Madam Commissioner, I
11 wish to introduce you to the family of Virginia Sue Pictou.
12 So on my immediate left is her sister, Marie. Next to her
13 is her sister, Agnes. Next to her is her nephew -- no, her
14 brother -- sorry -- Robert. Next to Robert is her brother,
15 Francis, and next to Francis is Virginia's father, Robert,
16 as well.

17 So, Mr. Registrar, if we could have the
18 oath?

19 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Good morning, everybody.
20 Robert. I think it's good. It should be on. I think the
21 microphone's on. Good morning.

22 **ROBERT PICTOU SR, AFFIRMED**

23 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Thank you.

24 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU SR:** Hello.

25 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Good morning.

2 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
Pictou, Robert Pictou Jr, Agnes Gould and Marie Pictou
In relation to Virginia Sue Pictou Noyes

1 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU SR:** Good morning. That's
2 better. Okay. *Wela'liog.* (Speaking in Native language.)

3 These are part of my family. I got a large
4 family, 14, and I love every one of them and I miss them.
5 My youngest ones are at home. They're 20 years old, a set
6 of twins, and my oldest right here, Marie.

7 I'm thankful that you called me here to give
8 testimony about my daughter, Virginia Sue. They called her
9 Virginia Sue Pictou Noyes. I don't recognize that Noyes
10 now. I can't in here, no. To me, she's still my daughter,
11 Virginia Sue Pictou, and it might hurt some people, but it
12 don't hurt me a bit. That's what I call her.

13 I know she's been called to the Spirit
14 World. Two or three different testimonies was given to me
15 that she's in the Spirit World. My other son, Carl (ph),
16 went before her, and I was told by a psychic.

17 You know, some people told me, "What's wrong
18 with you? You crazy or what?" I said, "Why?" "What are
19 you going around here, going to this one or that one and
20 everybody, no matter who they might be, try to find out
21 information?" I asked them. I said, "Do you have a
22 daughter that's missing or you have a son that's missing?"
23 "No." "Well," I said, "you know, if you did have a son or
24 a daughter missing, you'd explore all the avenues no matter
25 where they are," you know. I travelled from here clear to

3 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 Minnesota to look for answers. I found one in Minnesota.
2 I found the other one here just in Truro and what I
3 suspected, yes, that's what happened.

4 So when my daughter passed on to the Spirit
5 World, my other son that had gone before her, Carl -- and
6 the psychic told me, "Do you have a -- do you have anybody
7 that you know by the name of Carl that passed on?" I said,
8 "Yes," I had a son. She said, "Well, when your daughter
9 passed on to the Spirit World, your son was there and he
10 looked at her and he asked her, 'What are you doing here?
11 This is not your time.'" So there's two of them there now,
12 two of them that left this world, you know, not by old age
13 or by sicknesses, but they're in the Spirit World and I
14 think they're waiting for the rest of us.

15 You know, this is -- you've got to believe
16 in something in your life no matter who you are, no matter
17 where you're from. You always got to believe. And to me
18 when I was introduced to tradition, I accepted it and it
19 done a lot of things for me. It opened a lot of doors for
20 me and explained a lot of things for me.

21 I don't want to go on too much about my
22 daughter because it's going to hurt me. It hurts me
23 really, really, really bad when I see her name come up on
24 Facebook or something. It's just like it happened
25 yesterday.

4 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 My sons and my daughters will tell you their
2 side of the story, but 24 years, they say, healing will
3 come about and will heal each and every one of you. I
4 don't believe that. I've waited 24 years for healing. It
5 heals, all right, but then when that subject comes up, it's
6 like -- just like opening that wound all over again, you
7 know. So with that, I'll pass the mic over to my son and
8 let him testify.

9 I thank you very much for listening to me.
10 (Speaking in Native language.)

11 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Mr. Registrar, if we
12 could have the oath for Francis, please?

13 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Good morning, Francis.

14 **MR. FRANCIS PICTOU:** Good morning.

15 **FRANCIS PICTOU, AFFIRMED**

16 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Right on. Thank you.

17 **MR. FRANCIS PICTOU:** I grew up in a family
18 of 13. We were all paired up, Virginia and I, hand-in-
19 hand; Robert and David; Agnes and Carl; so on and so forth
20 throughout our family. We played together all the time,
21 Virginia and I, climbing through the trees, Wonder Woman,
22 Superman, you know, who beat who, and I always lost because
23 if not, when I got home, I got it from my other brothers,
24 you know, so she was always fun.

25 She was real, always had a good spirit,

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1 never vengeful, aggressive, unless you provoked her.

2 Like this tea set, I don't know if my sister
3 put it out there or if it's symbolic for something else. I
4 remember sitting at the top of the -- at the top of the
5 driveway with my sister. It rained the night before, so
6 there was puddles of mud around. She made mud pies and
7 tea. She was probably about seven years old and I was nine
8 and I had to play house. I had to go with the flow, if not
9 I was going to hear it from my brothers, but she was so
10 fun-loving.

11 She started out at a very, very young age
12 being a nurturer. I didn't like it, but I had to do it,
13 you know. She was always caring about somebody else's kid.

14 You know, she was working towards a
15 wonderful goal in her life. She went to Upward Bound,
16 which is an extension where she could get a better life
17 than what she was stuck in. She didn't want to pick
18 potatoes, do blueberries. She wanted to be a part of the
19 community, be like an outreach. I'm not exactly sure what
20 she wanted to be, but alls [sic] I know is that if she put
21 her hands to it, she was going to do it because she was a
22 straight A student in junior high. When she got into high
23 school, she was a straight A student. And she started
24 getting very progressive in life until domestic violence.

25 No woman should be hit, slapped, cursed, or

6 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 hurt in any way, not even if you provoke. It doesn't
2 matter. You are our lifeline and you bring us our loved
3 ones. You bring them into our world. You -- when you
4 bring a child into this world, you are near death from pain
5 and agony on bringing us our future loved ones, our future
6 generations.

7 I'm going to step back a little bit on when
8 we were up here in Membertou. None of this was here, none
9 of it back in '72. Back here, it was all fields, bogs. I
10 call them cattails. We used to run around, get them, hit
11 each other with them, have fun, playful fun; fireflies,
12 catching the fireflies; catching that next girl's kiss;
13 running through the fields having fun. It was wonderful.

14 I don't know. I just hope that some of the
15 steps that we've done in our search and all the processes
16 that we did don't stop. Don't give up. If you know
17 something, keep going. Keep going and just -- even though
18 it feels like it's an endless lead, that it's -- it's not
19 true, go after it. Go after that lead because you never
20 know. You might regret it later on that you don't follow
21 that one lead, you know. I mean we've had cadaver dogs and
22 on foot all across the country -- all across the country,
23 all through the woods of Maine, mountains terrain, trees,
24 refrigerators, anything where you could dump a body because
25 we know in our heart -- we know that she's gone.

7 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 To us, she's missing. To the guy that
2 killed her, she's not missing. He put her some place. He
3 put her some place, so to him she's not missing because he
4 knows where she's at.

5 On my way over here, it's a long ride from
6 Massachusetts. Your mind runs and runs and runs. Don't
7 get me wrong. It was a beautiful journey here.

8 I tried reaching out to the man that did
9 this because he's on his deathbed. He's the last one that
10 knows because there was two of them that did it because
11 they confessed at a party that they killed the Dragon Lady.
12 They were brothers like this. They ravaged the community.
13 They intimidated people, intimidated my own sister that I
14 just found out a couple of days ago by criminal
15 threatening. One of them died of complications of HIV, a
16 miserable death. Karma always knocks on your door, so play
17 nice. And the other one is suffering too because he has a
18 tumour in his head. He can barely walk and barely see.

19 On my way up here I reached out to the
20 community up in Aroostook County, part of our land, our
21 ancestral land. He refused even to the last. I'm just
22 hoping that he reaches out and says, "Okay, she's here."
23 And I don't care if he serves jail time. I just want my
24 sister laying with her two children, which is how she
25 lost -- she lost two children through a fire and it was a

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1 suspicious fire that the baby -- the two babies, not grown
2 children, babies lost their lives hiding underneath a bunk
3 bed and the other one in a closet. I could go on about how
4 that came about, how we think it's suspicious, but we know
5 it's suspicious because the way it -- the way it happened,
6 all the circumstances that led up to it.

7 People say that she probably got tired. She
8 got tired and she wanted a break and she got away. Any
9 parent in here knows if you lose one child, you grab a hold
10 of the next one and say, "This one's not going anywheres."
11 I know she didn't leave her children. We all know. The
12 circumstances that transpired afterwards, he torched the
13 car to get rid of the evidence. And the police force over
14 there is one state trooper in a vast, vast community. It's
15 huge, a lot of terrain.

16 I miss my sister so much. The only thing I
17 can do is be there for her children and her grandchildren.
18 It's just not fair. It's not fair. Wela'lin.

19 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Francis, I'm wondering if
20 we could talk a little bit for the Commissioner's benefit?
21 When did Virginia Sue go missing?

22 **MR. FRANCIS PICTOU:** Virginia went missing
23 April 24th, 1993. The first newspaper clipping that came
24 out in regards to Virginia's disappearance came out in
25 September of 1994, a year later after her disappearance.

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1 Could we play the race thing on this? I'm sure we could
2 because they wouldn't stop for anybody else, but they
3 stopped for her. She's a mother and her disappearance was
4 very suspicious. I'm going to let my brother, Robert,
5 explain the rest because I need time. Thank you.

6 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Mr. Registrar, if we
7 could have the oath?

8 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** He actually meant
9 sister.

10 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Morning, Agnes.

11 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** (Speaking in Native
12 language.)

13 **AGNES GOULD, AFFIRMED**

14 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Excellent. Thank you.

15 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** My name is Agnes Gould.
16 I'm the oldest. Just to give you a rough idea in the line
17 of order of family, when my mother was very -- when I was
18 very young and my mother said, "I'm going to have a baby,"
19 I said, "oh, yes, I'm going to have a sister. Hee-Haw."
20 Guess what? I had a brother, and another one, and another
21 one, and another one, and finally my sister arrives on
22 Easter weekend and I was thrilled.

23 With this in mind, we -- I got to help feed
24 her, clothe her, clean her. When -- you learn a lot of
25 things. Like you don't hold a baby up after they've eaten

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1 because they'll throw up all over you, things like that;
2 right? I helped her learn how to walk. When she got
3 scared, she used to come to my room and for some reason,
4 little kids have ice cold feet, but it didn't matter. I
5 loved my sister and I loved my brothers. They learned a
6 lot from me because I'm the oldest.

7 I started being nice to them by the time I
8 was 12 because they were beginning to be taller than me and
9 I was like, "Whoa, I think I'd better be nice." She's on
10 the other end and she's saying, "You will do what I say
11 because you're going to pay for it if you don't," right?

12 There's a beautiful picture of us with my
13 mother holding Virginia. That beautiful picture, she's
14 also carrying my youngest brother, but, as you can tell,
15 Carl is right there listening to me. I'm holding onto
16 Francis. David -- Daa-vid (ph) is looking forward. Robert
17 is going, "What?" you know, so we're all right there in
18 that picture. We grew up together. We'd do a lot of great
19 things together and there was a lot of great, great
20 memories I could share about my sister.

21 One of the things that I -- that I have to
22 say is her children do not have these same kind of memories
23 and I'm speaking because her children don't have the love
24 of a mother to say, "I love you, Touce (ph). I love you,
25 Quiz (ph)."

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1 We carried our firstborns together. We were
2 pregnant together. I'm going to reach out to you, Marie,
3 for a minute. And when you have a sister, when you do,
4 "Oh, yes," you know. They're 28 days apart. Of course,
5 what do you do? You put all the pictures together, "Oh,
6 this one's a cousin. This one's a cousin."

7 When my brother got married, this one, first
8 marriage, second marriage, I don't know, they -- they ended
9 up being together in the wedding, so you can see how close
10 even cousins get, generational, so my sister and I were
11 very close together.

12 When she'd become involved with the man
13 that -- there was two men that were brutally beating her,
14 by the way, on State Street in Bangor, Maine, the day of
15 her disappearance. Before that, several times she would
16 call me. I would jump in my car and I would go up and pick
17 her up and the kids and I'd take her to my home at that
18 time and I would ask her questions like, "Where'd you get
19 the black eye?" "Oh, I ran -- I walked into a door."
20 "Where'd you get those marks on the back of your neck?"
21 "Oh, I fell in the bathtub." "Ah, they look like
22 fingerprint marks to me. Was somebody holding you down,
23 somebody" -- and she started to share some of all her other
24 bruises, some of her other parts, and that's just the
25 physical evidence. Many times, she told me about the

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1 emotional abuse, the mental abuse. We would talk about our
2 children. As sisters, you can see how it is. Many times
3 we shared many, many things together because it was some
4 stuff you couldn't share with your brothers till you got
5 older.

6 So on April 24th, 1993, when she
7 disappeared, I was doing a sweat lodge ceremony in Indian
8 Brook and I was getting blows, by the way, to my head in
9 the sweat itself in the third round and I was like, "Whoa,
10 what's this?" so I couldn't do the fifth round, so she
11 ended up -- I ended up asking another sweat keeper if they
12 could do the fifth round, which is the bear round, by the
13 way, for us. And then I went and had a dream later on that
14 two men were dragging a young woman and they were burying
15 her -- burying her. I woke up in a panic, "Oh, My God.
16 Oh, My God." Then I ended up going and calling and they
17 told me, "Your sister's missing." I said, "What?" So I
18 jumped in my car and tried to make it to Northern Maine, in
19 the area that she was in, or even to Bangor.

20 My brother is all the way down in New
21 Hampshire. He had the exact same dream. And through all
22 the ceremonies and everything like that, we've all had the
23 exact same dream of two men burying a young woman, covering
24 up the evidence. And on the flyer, it says, "Missing." We
25 know in our hearts otherwise, but because of the legality

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1 of it, we have to say missing.

2 The timeline, it took us quite a while. Why
3 did it take a long time? For one thing, after a shaking
4 tent ceremony, she might be in the Spirit World. We buried
5 my brother, Carl, three years to the day of her
6 disappearance. She -- he left a note that, "I'm going to
7 help Gin on the other side," that's Carl.

8 And then David -- Daavid (ph), she might be
9 in the Southern Maine area. He's down in Kennybunk, right?
10 This is all part of our ancestral lands, by the way, part
11 of the Mi'kmaq territories and my brother -- and somebody
12 said, "Well, she might be on the west coast." My brother,
13 Robert here, lives on the west coast in BC. "She might be
14 in the Boston area." My brother over here, Francis, lives
15 down in the Boston area. "Well, she might turn up in
16 Northern Maine." My brother, Darrel," who we call Ditch
17 lives in the Northern Maine area. Well, she's from
18 Membertou. Where am I? I live in Membertou, right? "She
19 might come to the mainland," so we've got extended family
20 everywheres.

21 Our family, when we did the timeline, there
22 was a lot of foot searches, a lot of ceremonies, and it's
23 extensive because we offered it to the Commission so you
24 could see how family-driven we are, and that's not even
25 including what dad's done over time. I mean we've included

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1 all of it. And when we've talked to media, one of the
2 things we say the most is, "Break the silence. Stop the
3 violence." It's the one thing that we continually stand up
4 for because as an Indigenous person, many times you're
5 targeted.

6 To give you a rough idea, Commissioner,
7 when -- at one point I was getting letters that said, "Ah,
8 she's just another Indian. They're not going to find her,"
9 so -- "She's dark." Obviously, right? So we've
10 had -- dealt with a lot of prejudice wherever we've gone.
11 It's part of life, right? It's part of the norm for us.
12 It's how you deal with it. Education for us is -- we do a
13 lot of education around our culture, our beliefs, and
14 people are beginning to see us, who we are as a people.

15 Our ancestral lands, by the way, go beyond
16 those borders. I could tell you about the Jay Treaty, the
17 Treaty of Ghent, the Watertown Treaty, which is celebrated
18 each year, so to us it's not just a Canada issue. Ours go
19 on -- our ancestral land goes far beyond.

20 I'm going to stop for minute and give this
21 microphone over to one of my brothers, you know, and have
22 him speak a little bit since I need a little bit of
23 breathing room, but you can ask me a question any time
24 after; okay?

25 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** I'm waiting.

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1 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Time to get to work.

2 Robert, good morning.

3 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** Good morning.

4 **ROBERT PICTOU JR, AFFIRMED**

5 **MR. REGISTRAR:** Thank you very much.

6 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** Good morning,
7 Commissioners. Good morning, our Elders. I'm going to say
8 good morning to our -- our matriarchs and our Elders in the
9 audience. Welcome to the traditional territory of the
10 Mi'kmaq people.

11 I currently live in BC and I live on the
12 traditional territory of the Tsimshian people. They have a
13 word out there and it's *adaawx* and it's, "Speak your
14 truth." For 23 years, we've been wanting to speak our
15 truth and today's our day. Halleluiah. Today's our day.

16 I wanted to share a story of my sister.
17 When we were little -- and you know, we're a big family.
18 Dad was a hardworking man. As all the women have
19 commented, he has fairly large hands. Yeah, I saw you look
20 (indiscernible). But laughter is good. Laughter is
21 healing, you know. But dad has worked hard. He's worked
22 with his hands all -- all his life and he did his best to
23 serve us with, you know, just even the minimum.

24 Dad grew up in a -- in a wigwam with a dirt
25 floor, so when we grew up in a house that had no running

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1 water, but it had electricity in the house, that's a step
2 up, you know.

3 Well, in that house we called the Old House,
4 one memory that came when -- when my family was speaking
5 was -- I think it was a Sunday, I'm not sure, and it could
6 have been any other day, but Sunday was usually bath day,
7 so it may not have been that day. I mean we didn't have
8 any running water, so. And we had this fairly large cast
9 iron sink. You remember that sink, right? It was large
10 and you did your dishes, and cut your vegetables, and it
11 was our bathtub all in one day.

12 Well, it was -- we were out and it had
13 rained. We were all little and we came across this huge
14 mud puddle, you know, and -- and it was like, "Hey," you
15 know, and so, "Let's go swimming," and so we decided to
16 splash around and sing and we were just having a blast,
17 laughing and being kids. And, you know, we were laughing
18 and joking all the way back because we got hungry, and I
19 guess that's what a part of family is about, right, you
20 know, when you go back home, mom's there.

21 So as we were travelling back home, you
22 know, we get back in and as we come in, you know,
23 we're -- you know, because it's a narrow doorway, we don't
24 even try to fight through. We just kind of go in. And I'm
25 near the end and, as they go in, there's my mom. She must

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1 have seen us coming down the -- the dirt road and we're
2 covered with mud. And, you know, as a mom with no running
3 water, all you see is, "Oh, oh, I've got to clean them all
4 up again." You remember the little ones. You know, it's
5 hard to get the little ones bathed, but -- without any
6 running water, so it's another task that she was not
7 looking forward to, so she let us know how she didn't
8 appreciate us being all muddy. And as we stepped through
9 the door, I could hear -- I could hear the -- the
10 switches -- because, you know, we were bad -- go singing
11 through the air as we were going in and, you know, it came
12 to my young mind -- it's like, "Okay, if I don't step
13 through that door, I won't get hit," so I didn't.

14 I ran and hid and so -- you know, and it
15 seemed like I hid in this old car with -- where my uncle
16 had this vehicle that -- and it was in the burdock bushes.
17 And so what seemed like an eternity for me, I -- I then
18 came out and just -- I opened the door really quiet, "Eek,
19 eek, whack." She was standing behind the door because she
20 had just finished cleaning all of us.

21 Yeah, we were bad kids, you know, but we
22 were kids, you know, but we were able to -- you know, of
23 course, I found out later on that my mom, every time she
24 punished us, she went into her room and she cried. And I
25 asked her why does she do it. She goes, "I wanted to bring

18 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 you guys up good," you know, and -- you know, like I said,
2 this was one of the things that as a family that we have to
3 deal with, and her kids, they never got to experience that.

4 You know, there was other times that were
5 mentioned, about burdocks. You know, we were poor, you
6 know, and it was kind of cool. We had -- you know guys,
7 you know, yes, we got long hair, you know, and, you know,
8 we didn't have much.

9 Dad worked hard, but we didn't have any
10 choice, so you do what kids do, so we'd have burdock
11 fights. Oh, yeah, I see the Elders' heads moving, "Oh,
12 yeah." You take all the burdocks and stuff them all
13 together, you know, and you throw them at each other and
14 they stick on. You know, they hit you and it sticks on
15 you. It's almost like a paint ball, like a -- like a
16 Mi'kmaq paint ball, I guess you could call it. It was all
17 fine and good until it gets in your hair, you know, and
18 then longer hair, that's where it kind of goes against you,
19 you know. And, you know, we have all these stories
20 of -- of Virginia.

21 And as a family, the -- you know, with my
22 sister going missing, you know, you focus on the pain
23 because that's what you feel and each one of us have
24 gone -- had to go a separate way in order to find our
25 healing, you know, because we had to deal with them, you

19 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 know, without Virginia being there, can't reach out.

2 You know, I mentioned earlier about social
3 media. Social media is great. Facebook is a great thing
4 for us, you know, Instagram, Twitter, things like that
5 because we can share and, as you say, our family is spread
6 out, you know, but I can say this. I want to say thank you
7 to the Commissioners and for all that put on this because
8 my brother, who's beside me, we haven't been this close for
9 21 years, you know, because we're all dealing with our own
10 pain in our own way. And we come up and visit, but we
11 always kind of missed each other, you know, but we always
12 know. We call or message each other, things like that,
13 and -- but this Inquiry brought us here to speak our
14 *adaawx*.

15 Did you have any questions?

16 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Sure, I have some
17 questions about the details. So where -- where was it that
18 Virginia went missing?

19 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** Do you want me to
20 cover the -- what happened? Yeah, I can.

21 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Where -- where was it?
22 Where was the last place that she was seen?

23 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** One thing that we run
24 into as a family is, you know, we get leads. There's leads
25 that we get because we get zero from the officials. We

20 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
Pictou, Robert Pictou Jr, Agnes Gould and Marie Pictou
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1 have -- if you say, "Robert, give me something official
2 showing that Virginia is missing or whatever," I cannot.
3 I -- I apologize, Commissioner. I can't give you that
4 because I don't have it. They won't give it to us. We
5 have absolutely nothing to prove to you that my sister is
6 gone.

7 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** So, Robert -- Robert,
8 what authorities were you dealing with?

9 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** Yeah. As you kind of
10 heard earlier, our ancestral territory is Northern
11 Maine -- Maine, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward
12 Island. We -- we cover a large territory, you know. We're
13 Mi'kmaq. We're big. We have a lot of area to cover.

14 Later on, two other countries drew a line on
15 a piece of paper and they go, "No, everyone on this side is
16 American. Everyone on this side is Canadian," and we go,
17 "But this is Mi'kmaq territory."

18 Virginia went missing in the State of Maine.
19 The accident happened on State Street, as dad said, so
20 yeah.

21 So what happened was, Virginia went to go
22 visit. She went visiting her father-in-law who lived down
23 in the Bangor, Maine, area. She travelled, as I
24 understood, with her husband and her brother-in-law.

25 As you may notice throughout the thing and

21 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 you may -- I'll say her brother was Larry Noyes -- I mean
2 her husband was Larry Noyes. Her brother-in-law is Roger
3 Noyes. I believe there's truth in -- there's strength in
4 words, power in words, and as you notice in our family, we
5 really don't mention their names because we don't want to
6 give them that power and I'll kind of continue along with
7 that.

8 So they went to a bar and, you know, she's
9 young. She's 26. Hey, who doesn't, right, go there and
10 have some fun? And a [sic] argument broke out and she
11 said, "Fine, I'm leaving," and she was going out towards
12 the door. And these details I'm telling you are what I
13 read from a copy of a police report that I was able to get;
14 however, I was not -- there we -- okay, there we
15 go -- however, I was unable to bring that because
16 officially I can't get it, but this report I read said she
17 was walking towards the door.

18 As she's walking towards the door, Larry ran
19 up behind her and jump-kicked her out the door. I guess
20 this may or may not be unusual behaviour because really
21 nothing was done. So she fell on the pavement face first,
22 flipped over. He jumped on her. He's a fairly large man.
23 He pinned her down, put his knees on her arms, and
24 proceeded to beat her about her face. Her brother-in-law
25 came out after him, and he kneeled down facing his brother,

22 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 and he proceeded to beat my sister about the face. Two
2 full-grown men pound -- pinned down 125-pound woman and
3 they're physically beating her on the street and nobody
4 does nothing. It tells you of the mindset when it comes to
5 our Indigenous women in this area.

6 Finally, it came out where the police were
7 going to -- someone said, "I'm calling the police." So
8 what they did is they took my sister and they dragged her
9 around the building to the back and continued to beat her
10 and kick her until the police arrived.

11 When the police arrived -- and this is where
12 it conflicts, but they fled the scene. My sister's there.
13 She's crying. She's beaten. She's, you know -- the
14 officer starts taking down her report of what happened.
15 She tells them. Then Roger shows up or the brother-in-law
16 shows up and he is belligerent, so he gets arrested. "Did
17 you hit her?" "Of course I did. What kind of man do you
18 think I am?" you know, he's very proud of the fact that he
19 inflicted this. He puts -- he puts her in the back of the
20 police car and -- and the officer said, "Well, who did
21 this? Who started" -- you know, and she initially said her
22 husband did.

23 Well, when he showed up, my sister
24 immediately changed her story, which we all know is
25 something that happens with domestic violence. You do

23 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 not -- you do not accuse your abuser.

2 So she -- the -- when that happened, he
3 went -- he -- the officer pulled her aside and told her
4 that he could protect her. He said, "You know, we can give
5 you a restraining order. Now, you know, he can't come
6 within your area. He can't come near the house. He
7 can't -- it will -- it will help you." She took his word
8 for that, that -- that she would be protected. For a woman
9 to come forward who's been abused systematically, to -- to
10 reach out and someone says they will help you and for them
11 to believe it -- so she did. She accepted this officer's
12 help, saying he -- they would protect her with this
13 restraining order.

14 So Larry was then taken into custody and put
15 in the back and he immediately started to kick the windows
16 and stuff like that and they sent him off.

17 A little bit of background on what happened
18 before. Now, this was -- for them being arrested meant
19 that they would go to prison. You kind of look at me and
20 say, "How can they go to prison for domestic violence or
21 even violence, assault?" and it's because they had a long
22 criminal record of violence and they had actually been on
23 probation at that time for going into a graveyard and
24 destroying headstones just because it was fun for them and
25 so they got -- you know, they were given probation, a very

24 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 lenient system, the -- the judicial system if you're not my
2 colour.

3 So they -- they were hauled off and Virginia
4 was taken about a half mile down the road to the Eastern
5 Maine Medical where she was admitted. She's at the
6 hospital and they took pictures as they normally do, filled
7 out the report.

8 She then -- my sister, Agnes found out later
9 on that -- she talked to one of the workers and a gunshot
10 victim had come in. It's the only trauma centre in the
11 area, so all the -- everything that happens, you know, they
12 bring them there. So they went to go take care of this
13 person and all of a sudden they look back and my sister's
14 gone, just gone, and that is honestly truly the last place
15 we could say officially that's where she was. That's the
16 last place that we can bring her to.

17 Now, of course, there's all kinds of
18 speculation. As a family over 23 years, we hear, you know,
19 what happens. Well, what officially happened was
20 Larry -- I mean the brother-in-law was -- was charged with
21 assault, so he was released on R and R. It's just assault
22 to a woman, Indigenous woman, so they released -- just
23 released -- even though he has a longstanding record, just
24 release him.

25 Because of the domestic violence charge,

25 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 Larry could not be released on an R and R, so they gave him
2 a bail, which his brother quickly raised and they bailed
3 him out and that's when the official record stops because
4 we have no idea officially what happened.

5 There's been -- we've chased down his
6 family's -- we've chased down rumours of everything, that
7 she was spotted hitchhiking there, she was seen here, she
8 was seen there.

9 Imagine losing a loved one and then
10 discovering or hear in a report that she's alive and you go
11 and check it out and then find out that someone stole her
12 identity. Yeah, that's what happened. This is -- you
13 know, we don't give up. We don't give up.

14 But -- so the story goes that, you know, my
15 sister disappeared. We didn't know what happened; that the
16 husband went home and said he was waiting for her even
17 though with her restraining order, he was not supposed to
18 be at the house. He said he received a phone call from
19 Virginia where she was about an hour's drive away looking
20 for a ride. He stayed at the house. He wouldn't get in
21 the car and drive that hour to go pick up his own wife, so
22 he said. We have no way of proving that, but for -- for a
23 woman who's been victimized, abused, to actually reach out
24 for help and say, "Yes" -- and a restraining order does not
25 have -- it's a piece of paper. How is that piece of paper

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1 going to protect you when that abuser comes through that
2 door because that's what's going to happen, you know, so.

3 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Let's talk a little bit,
4 if you wouldn't mind, about the efforts that you and your
5 family members made to try to find Virginia Sue.

6 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** So immediately what
7 happened after, you know, we got word that Virginia was
8 missing, you know, we -- we kind of sprang into action.

9 We -- my sister, Agnes, actually got in the
10 car with my brother, David, and they drove the -- I think I
11 clocked it out. It was like 450 kilometres from the
12 distance of where she was last officially seen to the
13 house, and they stopped at every rest stop and looked for
14 signs.

15 My dad is holding a picture right now and
16 that picture that he's holding is actually one that we put
17 on a flyer. And we -- we're poor. We didn't have a lot of
18 money, so we found that -- this beige paper was the
19 cheapest one out there and so that's what we did, a bunch
20 of copies. Agnes was the one who put that together. And
21 we put out flyers immediately because we got no help.

22 There was -- there was nothing far -- as far
23 as victim services. There was nothing as far as the state
24 police or even the -- the police department talking to us,
25 saying, "You know, here. We can help. We have these

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1 resources." Counselling, yeah, no, there was none, but as
2 a family -- and so -- but we followed every lead we could.

3 We -- we searched fields. We searched
4 swamps. We talked to family. We did our own
5 investigation. We hired private investigators. We've gone
6 to psychics. We've done sweat lodges. We've done
7 ceremony. We've done shaking tent. We've done pipe
8 ceremony, all in a search to find my sister, but it's gone
9 nowhere.

10 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** So with respect to the
11 impact that it's had, Virginia Sue, when she went missing,
12 how many children were alive at that time?

13 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** Do you want to talk
14 about that?

15 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Sure.

16 As you know, us sisters were very close and
17 our firstborns are together. She has five surviving
18 children. At one point, she asked me to take care of the
19 little girl named Ashley. Marie, you can show the picture
20 on your shirt. This is a picture of Ashley when she was
21 just first born. Virginia came down and said, "Could you
22 take care of her?" and I did. I had no problem because
23 she's my sister and she can trust me since her -- her
24 little one's in my care. And then he came down, "I want
25 the little girl." She was hiding behind me and it was

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1 like, "No." "Who's he?" Larry Noyes, her husband, he's
2 standing at the gate, "I want the little girl," and I stood
3 at the door and I said, "No," and I held my ground, "No,
4 you're not having her," and she's hiding behind me.

5 She stayed with us to the point that my
6 children called her sister. She crawled into bed with my
7 children. She followed my children. To this day, I have
8 pictures of her, but I can't show them. It hurts too much,
9 okay?

10 So she came down and she asked, "Can I have
11 her?" and I said, "Okay," and she went with her mom, my
12 sister. And she had a little, little new baby, a newborn,
13 Britney.

14 And then the fire, October 20th, 1990,
15 happened. My sister was very brave. The fire broke out
16 and Ashley went down the other end to get her little
17 brother, Jessie James. My sister ended up breaking open
18 the window. Threw Randy, the oldest, out; then
19 Christopher; and then threw the baby, Britney, out the
20 window for Randy to catch. And then she tried to go down
21 the other end. She burned her arm. She burned her hair.
22 And we lost two children in that fire. The trailer burnt
23 down in three minutes flat, but she still tried to get her
24 children out. She saved three of her children that day by
25 herself, all alone.

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1 She told me years later after that what had
2 transpired before that event because she would come and we
3 would talk and we held on to each other because we have one
4 child together that I took care of and that she gave birth
5 to and I gave back to her, no problem, so we lost a child
6 together.

7 So after this she asked Robert over here,
8 "Can you take care of Britney for me for a while?" so
9 Robert took care of Britney. As you can see, we are very
10 strong on supporting each other and if Larry came down to
11 ask him, he would have stood there at the door and said,
12 "No," just like I stood at the door and said no.

13 She had two more children. She came down
14 several times whenever she was beaten because I would go up
15 and get her. Now, she has two more children by the name of
16 Myley and Lanae. At the time of Virginia's missing, Gin,
17 who we call Gin, her youngest daughter was nine months old.
18 I held that baby when she was one day old because I'm her
19 sister, "Come, come, let's -- let's share this joy. Let's
20 share this beauty," so now she has five surviving children.
21 Those children matter a great deal because family matters
22 to us, but, more importantly, our children matter.

23 Those children reached out because they were
24 taken away, by the way, years later. They told us about
25 the abuse they suffered. Our family was not told when

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1 those children were taken away. In the United States, they
2 have a federal law. It's called the *Indian Child Welfare*
3 Act and it's to do with any nation that's to do with that
4 child and they have to contact whatever family member there
5 is in whatever state. They didn't contact us because we
6 are in Canada, but this is ancestral lands we're talking
7 about, so we were not contacted.

8 Those children were taken from the tribe and
9 they were put in homes that were not Mi'kmaw or anything.
10 They changed their last names. We were not allowed any
11 contact at all with these children that are part of our
12 family, but you know what? I bump into them after they got
13 older. "I remember you, Auntie Ag. Hey, Auntie Ag, you
14 know, you can do this for me." "Oh, yeah, come on. Come
15 on, Quiz. Let's do this. Let's go. Let's do that." And
16 the youngest one, Lanae, at the age of 14, she says, "I
17 want" -- reached out to me and says, "Can you tell
18 me -- can you tell me about your [sic] mother?" so I
19 started sharing stories about her mother.

20 Every year in the month of April, those
21 children are re-traumatized by being asked by the state
22 officials, "Have you seen your mother? Have you heard from
23 your mother?" but us as a family is not informed. We're
24 not told of where these children were. Now, they come to
25 us. They come to us when they want a ceremony. They come

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1 to us, "Teach us our way again. Teach us a little bit of
2 our language. Teach us about some of those ancestor
3 legends," so you're kind of bringing back children back
4 into the fold.

5 I don't have the opportunity today to ask,
6 "Hey, sis, hey, did you hear your granddaughter graduated
7 from kindergarten?" right? These are some of the things as
8 a sister I would miss, but she had five surviving children.

9 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** And so who looked after
10 the children after she went missing?

11 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Directly after
12 she -- the -- after her missing, he took the children.

13 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** And he is Larry?

14 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** That is Larry, that's
15 correct. And when Lanae came to me, Lanae showed me
16 cigarette burns on the back of her back, on the back of her
17 buttocks. They told me stories of horrendous abuse that
18 they suffered from the father.

19 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** From Larry?

20 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Yes. These are her
21 children. These are children I held when they were first
22 born, from day one, somebody that my sister didn't get to
23 hold.

24 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** So the State of Maine
25 took the children from Larry?

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1 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Yeah, they -- they took
2 the children from Maine. Who wants to speak about that
3 part, when Larry was arrested for endangering the lives of
4 the children?

5 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Okay. So when -- and
6 that's when you -- the children were placed for adoption?

7 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** They were placed into
8 various foster homes and then one family stepped up and
9 said, "We will take the three youngest girls," and they
10 took -- this is after the fact, by the way -- then they
11 took the two oldest boys. The two oldest boys, by the way,
12 we called the Boys of Thunder, right, because they were
13 like (unreportable sounds) all over the place. And then we
14 lost two children. And then the three youngest ones are
15 today that we see.

16 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** And how did you find the
17 children?

18 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Through social media and
19 Lanae asking questions about who -- and that's when she
20 reached out to me and about, "I'm your niece," and I was
21 like, "Who is this?" but I remembered the name Lanae when I
22 held her in my arm when she was one days old. I remember
23 as she was growing up as a little child, an infant, right?
24 I didn't see her after nine months, so.

25 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** So can we talk a little

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1 bit about your parents, so Virginia Sue's parents? Did
2 either one of them go to residential school?

3 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU SR:** May I talk about
4 that?

5 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Dad, you want to talk
6 about the residential school for a minute? Just a minute.

7 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU SR:** Hold on, hold on.

8 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Got to make it
9 official then.

10 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU SR:** When I was put into
11 the residential school, I done a very simple thing there
12 that I ever done and I think it would be -- it would be
13 overlooked today. My grandmother was playing cards. The
14 old people, the old way, no TV, no radio, no nothing, so
15 the only way they had something to do was to sit down and
16 play cards. As a young person, you don't want to be near
17 the old people. They'll tell you, "Go play," so, sure
18 enough, I went and played.

19 I went next door and played upstairs, played
20 with the one same person, same age as I am. I played
21 around. When they got done playing cards, they couldn't
22 find me, so they drug [sic] the river that's -- not the big
23 river down in Shubenacadie, but the river on the reserve.
24 Some people knows about that river on the reserve. It's
25 only a small little brook, but they drug that river in

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1 March, cold, wet. They couldn't find me.

2 About that time, I walked from across the
3 road back to my *giju*'s. She said, "Son, where were you?"
4 I said, "Across the road." She said, "We looked all over
5 the place, couldn't find you. Sit down, have something to
6 eat." I had something to eat.

7 About maybe 15 minutes later, Mr. Rice and
8 Bill Duncan, who was the policeman up on the reserve at
9 that time, they came, put me in a car. My *giju* said, "What
10 are you doing?" He said, "I'm taking him away. You guys
11 can't look after him. I'll look after him." Said, "We
12 looked after him. All he did was go visit." They wouldn't
13 listen. They wouldn't listen to a lot of our mothers, a
14 lot of our grandmothers. They ripped the kids right out of
15 their mother's hands.

16 They took me to Shubenacadie School. Could
17 you imagine a boy six years old going into this big
18 building? You're looking at somebody -- or you're looking
19 at this person and I'm trying to talk my language to the
20 kids that's there, but they weren't allowed to answer me,
21 so (speaking in Native language).

22 You -- imagine, you know, you go into
23 this -- you go into this big place there and there's a
24 sister there. You don't know the sister from -- you don't
25 know nobody, but your grandmother and your grandfather and

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1 your -- your family, you know them, and you get into this
2 situation where this long drink of water is and you're only
3 small. She's wearing black clothes, a pair of prayer beads
4 there, and a white thing over her face. I didn't know who
5 she was. I -- I talked to her in my language, but she
6 couldn't answer because she wasn't Native.

7 My grandmother brought me up, not one single
8 word of English. ABCs, 1, 2, 3, names, dates, everything
9 was all the Native way. I was proud of that way.

10 They put me in that residential school, cut
11 my hair, stripped my clothes off, assigned a boy to take me
12 into the lavatory -- at that time that's what they called
13 it -- and scrubbed your body with a scrubbing brush, yeah.
14 Yeah, just think, the way that you turned around and used a
15 scrubbing brush on the floor is what they done to us.

16 As you know, all Native people, they have a
17 unique colour to their body. The sisters was trying to
18 scrub that off to turn you into a white man. It can't
19 happen. It can't. They scrubbed your body until it's red
20 and it don't do no good.

21 You go to bed at night, you're forced to
22 bed. You're laying there crying. You miss your mom. You
23 miss your dad. Sister comes over and gives you a damn good
24 slap. "You ain't got your mother here now and you ain't
25 got your dad here now. It's me. You're going to listen to

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1 me."

2 And sometimes you could hear those kids
3 crying. They're only, you know, the first time away from
4 home and introduced to a -- you know, a situation like
5 that. I heard a lot of people crying in there, a lot -- a
6 lot of crying in there.

7 You was given a number. That number was
8 stamped onto your clothes. This number stayed with you
9 from the time you went in to the time you went out. When I
10 went in, my number was 102. When I went out, it was 72.
11 When they took this thing there that they happened years
12 ago to find out how many children went to that school at
13 one time, I said, "When I was there, there was over a
14 hundred and some odd boys," and they said, "No, there
15 wasn't that many. There was only 50." "No, there wasn't
16 50," because when I looked at that paper, a lot of those
17 names were erased out. They were blacked out.

18 I spent seven years in that school. If you
19 went to that school and you survived that school, there's
20 nothing in any land that could be more harmful than what
21 they done to us in the school.

22 They taught the young girls from the age of
23 eight to ten years old to do the cooking, standing on a
24 stool with a great big ladle, you know, stirring the
25 porridge. I'll tell you sometime, boy, oh, boy. I still

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1 eat porridge, but sometimes those girls would put too much
2 salt in there. Oh, they'd chase that away. It was salty.
3 And sometimes it was lumpy, with great big lumps in there.
4 And sometimes it was half-cooked and sometimes it was
5 watery, but, you know, you can't blame the kids because
6 they didn't know nothing, you know. They didn't know
7 nothing about -- this is their first introduction about
8 cooking.

9 They done their best and we would put
10 porridge every morning, a mug of milk, and three slices of
11 homemade bread cut in half soaked with molasses. That was
12 good. Man, that was good. Everybody liked that.

13 Dinnertime come, sometimes you had stew on
14 the plate. The turnips were kind of woody. Sometimes the
15 potatoes would be half cooked and all the time your food
16 would be ice cold, but you had to eat that. You were
17 forced to eat that and you had to eat it.

18 I had a bad experience in there when they
19 butchered a cow and they brought the remains up there that
20 everybody could eat off of it. You know, they cooked it
21 and everything. They forgot to clean a little spot. There
22 was a piece of gut about that much, about that big. They
23 seen it on my plate and they said, "What's wrong with
24 that?" I said, "I don't eat that. That's gut. It's no
25 good." She took that and she held my nose. She took the

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1 spoon and forced my mouth open and shoved it down my
2 throat. It went down my throat, but it came back up. When
3 it came back up, it came back up on the plate. When it
4 came back up on the plate, what was on the plate that
5 sister, Sister Joseph Adrian -- we nicknamed her, all the
6 boys -- some of the boys that lives here on this reserve
7 and some of the boys around still know who I'm talking
8 about. They used to call her (speaking in Native
9 language). She rubbed my face in that.

10 Then she took me to what they called the
11 scourging room. That's the soap room. No windows, one
12 door about that thick, one light. She put me in there.
13 She turned the light off because the light was operated on
14 the outside, and left me in pitch dark in the soap -- the
15 homemade lye soap was made there and that's where it was
16 stored. The only time I was taken out of there is when I
17 went to bed. That happened for a whole solid week. It
18 made me terrified about the dark. It made me really
19 terrified about the dark. I was scared for a long, long,
20 long while, even after I got out of the residential school.

21 You was fed, but you worked for your food,
22 yeah. The girls worked hard. Sometime I'd look over a
23 long, long corridor, almost like the breezeway here. I'd
24 look way over. I said, "Man, those girls got it made.
25 Look at them playing around up there, playing around up

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1 there. Hey, girls really got it made," until the time that
2 they came to the first meeting of the residential school
3 meeting. Nora Bernard put it up. And when one woman got
4 up and she turned around and she gave witness, it was
5 really bad for them. I thought the boys were treated bad.
6 The girls were treated bad. Today, those girls, if they
7 survived, they're our mothers, they're our grandmothers.
8 They're our -- our grandmothers and a lot of them came out
9 of that residential school, the girls did, that they didn't
10 know nothing about life.

11 If somebody wrote a letter home -- from home
12 and wrote a letter to their daughter and said, "When you
13 coming home? You're going to find out that you got a new
14 brother or you got a new sister," that letter would be
15 ripped up because it contained a very, very little smidgeon
16 of sexual life. So when these girls went home, they seen
17 this little boy or little girl running around, "Mom, who's
18 that?" "Oh, I wrote a letter to you. I told you you're
19 going to have a little brother or a little sister." "Well,
20 I didn't get it." It would traumatize girls again.

21 The girls weren't taught. I don't even
22 think they were ever taught even the word sex when they was
23 in that residential school, so when they came out -- when
24 they came out and had relations, they didn't even know what
25 it was. They had a child. They -- they was pregnant and

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1 they said, "Mom, I've got a sore stomach. What's wrong?
2 What's wrong? I don't -- I don't know what's wrong. I've
3 got a sore stomach." They didn't know. And then they
4 rushed with the strong pains, they rushed to the hospital
5 and they had a baby and the baby was put beside them, "Mom,
6 where did that come from? Where's -- what's that? Who's
7 is that?" Said, "That's yours. That's your baby." "How
8 come it's my baby? I don't -- I don't remember anything."
9 Their mother, which were grandmothers at that time, helped
10 their daughter to raise that child, how to feed it, how to
11 clothe it, how to change it and everything, so, you know,
12 that's -- that's bad like that.

13 And the men, a lot of our men when they came
14 out of that school -- I was 15. I couldn't even tell the
15 time. I went upstairs to visit my *giju*. (Speaking in
16 Native language.) I didn't know what she meant. I don't
17 know what she said. They took my -- they took my tongue.
18 They took it. And I looked at her and I could see tears.
19 They were running down her face and she had to go back and
20 tell me in a language that was foreign to her. She never
21 used the English language, so she talked, "What time is
22 it?" I went downstairs. I looked at the clock, come back
23 up, "The hand is here -- one long hand here, one short hand
24 is here," and that's how it is.

25 They taught the boys one specific thing when

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1 they went to the residential school, to work hard, be proud
2 of your work, and that was it -- that was it, and they gave
3 you a hard time from the day that you went in there to the
4 day that you went out.

5 Today, 60 some odd years later, I still have
6 flashbacks of the Indian residential school and I see
7 myself coming down those five flights of stairs and trying
8 to turn lights on in the boys' bathroom to use the
9 bathroom.

10 They had a different light section at that
11 time, a white light and a black light, one light -- one
12 little button turned it on, the other button turned it off,
13 but I could see myself standing there, six years old,
14 trembling and shaking and I could feel a cold, cold breeze
15 go from my ankles clear to my -- the top of my head. I
16 woke up in my bed. I was soaked, having nightmares and
17 flashbacks from the residential school.

18 We're not going to get over that. Some
19 people say, "Go here. Go there. Go this, go that, go
20 everything ourselves." When they come to me and tell me
21 that, I said, "No, this is no good for me." They said,
22 "Why?" I said, "As long as these here are open, as long as
23 this here is beaten, I can control that, but when these
24 eyes close at night and my heart slows down a little bit,
25 it comes back again, not all the time, but in certain times

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1 and I relive all the residential school and all the things
2 that it done to me." It made me strong. It made me work
3 and be proud of my work and do it right and not be scared
4 of hard work.

5 For 29 years bringing my children up, I
6 worked in a potato house, hard work. I didn't know the
7 first thing about any of them, but when I worked in the
8 potato house, it had a conveyor that brought that big
9 hundred-pound bag, landed -- landed on your shoulder, you
10 ran, oh, about from here to the door over there, threw the
11 hundred-pound bag just as high as could you reach, no
12 problem. Fifty-pound bags in a trailer were the same
13 thing. And I look back on that now and if I could take a
14 ten-pound bag and throw it that high, I'm going to be God
15 darn lucky, but that's -- that's how I like to treat you,
16 but I brought my children all up. I'm proud, yeah, very
17 proud as I sit here today. I'm very, very proud of all of
18 them.

19 A lot of people can't understand, but I
20 hug -- I hug my kids and I always give them a kiss on the
21 forehead. This is the old, old, old way that we used to do
22 it. I still carry it on today. My boys and my girls, in
23 their -- in their fifties, late fifties, early sixties,
24 some of them (indiscernible), that don't make no difference
25 to me in my heart. They're still mine and I still am man

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1 enough to show them that I love them. You've got to show
2 your children today. Don't tell them, "Oh, I love you,
3 Whiz. I love you." Give them that hug -- give them that
4 hug, assure them that you love them and they'll tell you
5 that they love you too. And how much money will you have
6 to spend to get somebody to tell you that they love
7 them -- or you love them. It don't cost no money. It
8 don't take no time, but you feel good here, hey, and you
9 feel good there. You feel good. You'll get your
10 (indiscernible).

11 Who's that walking down? Oh, that's my son.
12 Oh, he walks awful proud. Good for him, feel proud of who
13 he is and proud he is a man and proud he's an *Ilnu*. My
14 daughters, the same way. I'm proud of them. What you got
15 to be proud of? Hey, look how they turned out to be.
16 They're not in no prisons. They're not in no jails.
17 They're home and they got their own children. Sure, you
18 got to be proud, that's something to be proud of. I'm
19 proud of each and every one of them, every one, and there's
20 14 of them and five generations. How many people can claim
21 that? I'm proud of that and I thank the Creator every
22 morning.

23 (Speaking in Native language.) A simple
24 prayer, three seconds, and he gives me 24/7. Who's got the
25 better deal there? Yeah. Who's got the -- really, who's

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1 got the better deal, morning and night? I'm on the road,
2 the same way, (speaking in Native language). "Thank you,
3 Creator. Watch over me today as I'm driving my truck or my
4 car on the road that I get there and I get back."
5 (Speaking in Native language.)

6 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Wela'lio.

7 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** Do you want a
8 question?

9 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU SR:** Do you want a
10 question?

11 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Well, I'm wondering if it
12 would be a good time to take a break or whether you would
13 like to continue. I only have one more question for you.

14 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** How about a break?

15 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Sure.

16 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** A break.

17 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Would you like to take a
18 break or would you like to continue?

19 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** I know Mi'kmaq are long-
20 winded, but this shouldn't be very long.

21 My mother grew up the old way and she taught
22 some of that old way to us. By the way, we all do
23 beadwork. She taught us how to do beadwork at a young age.
24 She taught us a lot of the old techniques and peyote stitch
25 to her was that Comanche stitch, you know, those Comachees

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1 out there do it," but she also taught us a lot of things, a
2 lot of the old legends, a lot of the old stories.

3 She used to take me out to teach me about
4 the medicines. She didn't know how to read or write. She
5 was four feet ten and a half. You had to say the half
6 because if you didn't say the half, your hair moved; right?
7 "Hey." But there's moments when you have absolute clarity
8 and one day we were -- my sister and I were cooking for all
9 the kids and we were talking about she could make the best
10 fried chicken there was. My God, I couldn't get my chicken
11 to be like hers, right, and she goes, "Oh, man, you make
12 the best lasagne." But there was one thing we both agreed
13 on and that even if there wasn't much in the house as far
14 as food, my mother could come up a meal for all of us.

15 By the way, we learned how to break in in
16 all the potato houses at a young age. We learned what to
17 take from nature. There was many a times when my mother
18 would reach off her plate, be maybe Robert or Francis, if
19 there wasn't enough food.

20 Just to show you how poor we were at times,
21 we went to the town dump to get food, so there was no help
22 from anybody around us, but you know something? My mother
23 made sure we were fed, right, and she taught us a lot of
24 things of the old way. For a four foot ten and a half
25 woman, she was a mechanic, a carpenter. She -- yeah, she

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1 even changed her own oil and everything until these guys
2 grew up; right? She taught me how to change a tire. Whew,
3 four foot ten and a half. When the toaster was broken, we
4 didn't buy a new toaster. We gave it to mom. "Well,
5 she'll figure it out," right? She built greenhouses. She
6 taught us about gardening, right? We didn't have bunk
7 beds. Guess who made bunk beds? My mother. We didn't
8 have a table. Guess who made a table? It was my mother.
9 She didn't know how to read or write, but thanks to friends
10 like Pauline over here and exchanging those comic books
11 back then, she learned how to read and write, so regardless
12 of what you say is disadvantages, there's always
13 opportunity to learn.

14 And there was one thing she always taught us
15 and I'll say this because we talk about it a lot. You
16 don't start a fight, but you don't back down. That was one
17 of her biggest teachings for us, and that's my mother,
18 known as Susan, but in English it's Suzanne.

19 She was born an Isaac. She married my
20 father, Charlie Tony Gould, and then she met Bobby Pictou
21 and had several more children, so she became a widow at a
22 young age.

23 There's a lot I could tell you about my
24 mother and my grandmother, et cetera, et cetera, but one of
25 the things I've got to say is that it feels great to be a

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1 grandmother. Unfortunately, my sister is not seeing that
2 joy today.

3 Do I give this to you?

4 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** No, I have one. I only
5 have one more question and I'm wondering about the -- what
6 the family would like the National Inquiry to do. You have
7 some very specific ideas as to what you think the National
8 Inquiry should consider.

9 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Should we take a short
10 break?

11 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Sure, if that suits you.

12 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** That's -- that's a whole
13 different subject. Can we take a short break just to
14 stretch our legs?

15 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Sure. If we could have a
16 15-minute break.

17 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Sure.

18 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Thank you.

19 --- Upon recessing at 10:51 a.m.

20 --- Upon reconvening at 11:25 a.m.

21 **MS. MARIE PICTOU:** Hello. My name is Marie.
22 Does everybody hear me? I am Virginia's sister and I
23 didn't know Virginia -- I -- I knew her, but we didn't stay
24 in the same household, but she used to come and visit me
25 when dad and the family come down and visited us.

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1 I have a lot of good memories of her and her
2 children. She only had the two boys at the time and she
3 was a very lively person, a happy person, and -- and I
4 really enjoyed the times that we had together.

5 And I got into -- more into doing spirit
6 walks, sister spirit walks. We have gatherings and we have
7 people telling other stories and how their -- how they are
8 trying to cope with their situation. It is very difficult
9 talking about the stories that my dad talks about, talks
10 about how everybody is trying to help each other, getting
11 resources, and we try to be -- try to get the -- get the
12 story out there. And everybody -- a lot of people never
13 heard the story before and then you got to go and explain it
14 again, and it's not bothering me one bit. I could talk.

15 Anyway, we have sister spirit walk. What
16 else do we do? We do gatherings. We put a quilt up on our
17 reserve. I'm from Pomquet, and it's Afton, and we have a
18 sister spirit walk and we had a quilt of ladies -- women and
19 men that were missing and they have it on a quilt. It's on
20 display there in our gymnasium and we have a lot of support.
21 And we have people that come in from other reserves and they
22 come and help us and they join us. And we had the sister
23 spirit walk just this past October and a gathering. Oh, My
24 God, it was the best ever, and the weather was awesome, and
25 it was good to see so much people. Like a lot of people

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1 didn't know a lot about it.

2 And I had my daughters. They make banners
3 and they make posters and they keep up -- try to keep up
4 with all the information that's coming in, and some is good,
5 some is bad, and it's just -- it's really nice to just get
6 the message out there. And I know that we're not alone and
7 good -- good help from good people.

8 And I'm glad I am here today and -- and it's
9 very welcoming here on the reserve here. It's the first
10 time I stay here and it's -- the people here and the
11 resources and counsellors and everybody, oh, My God, so
12 welcoming, so glad I -- I came.

13 And I wasn't sure if I should go. I said, "I
14 don't know if I should go," and then I made up my mind. I
15 said, "Yes, I have to go. I have to -- I have to keep up
16 with the strength, and keep up with the sister spirit
17 walking, all the things that we do." We planted a tree.
18 When did we plant that tree, dad? A couple of years ago?

19 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU SR:** Yeah, planted a tree
20 outside the community hall in commemoration of my daughter.
21 That's like almost every community, they have something
22 there. They might have a tree or something. They -- they
23 might have a tree or a bush, something there to commemorate
24 the loss of a loved one that was murdered or missing, so
25 today then, you know, all of our reserves, we've got a lot

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1 of missing women, a lot of missing girls, a lot of murdered
2 people.

3 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Thank you.

4 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** I'm the other sister, one
5 of the others.

6 If you notice up in the front, there is
7 a -- a tea set, with a picture of my sister. That picture,
8 by the way, is done in beadwork, size 15s, and I'm doing a
9 set of medicine bags for her children from a piece of
10 beadwork that Virginia gave to me before she disappeared
11 and, in fact, Francis was in the room when she gave it to me
12 because it's the long loomed piece that -- yes, oh, he
13 remembers it now, so. And I've been sectioning it off and
14 putting it into medicine bags.

15 And one of the things, when we were Wiping
16 Away the Tears in Winnipeg, Robert and I was chosen to come
17 from a distance and we met in Winnipeg and we did the quilt
18 that you see that's posted; right? If you notice right
19 below the breasts of the ancestors, right above -- right
20 below the heart, that's where Virginia's picture is. That's
21 why you don't see Robert and I wearing a t-shirt because we
22 literally cut the -- the t-shirt. He put the -- what we
23 call the shield, the copper shield, of his beadwork, size
24 15s, on it. There it is as you can see and Francis called
25 me and asked me to put a yellow ribbon, representing her

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1 five surviving children, so we were doing this all for that
2 quilt that's now hanging in the legislation [sic] or
3 something. I can't remember, but it's hanging somewhere.

4 Anyway, one of the things we talked about is
5 humanizing the story. When you humanize a story, usually
6 you see just statistics; okay? Ever since Virginia was
7 young, she got a tea set and Francis can tell you how many
8 tea parties he went through to be with my sister; right?
9 And she always loved tea sets.

10 As you can see, this tea set has four cups
11 and four saucers. The old way, by the way, was to pour your
12 tea into the saucer and let it cool and drink it that way,
13 so we followed that for a long time. If you notice, the
14 teapot doesn't have a cover and the sugar bowl doesn't have
15 a cover. We're not going to sugar-coat anything and we are
16 going to take the lid off the teapot so it's not a cover-up,
17 so, with that in mind, we like to talk about a little bit of
18 the recommendations we'd like to give to the Commissioner
19 since our journey has been long and it's been family-fought.
20 You know, don't start a fight, but you don't back down;
21 right, Rose? See, they agree.

22 One of the things we'd like to tell you, we
23 want to talk about ancestral land. That border was put in
24 not by us, by others. So in our Nation, we deal with our
25 family all the way down to Boston because our ancestral

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1 lands go all the way down there, so let's open up a dialogue
2 about our Nation. Our ancestral lands is not just a problem
3 for Canada, right?

4 We'd like to see some services offered to
5 families, especially in the area of education for prevention
6 of violence towards women and children, two-spirited,
7 transgender, and men.

8 So some of the other things we'd like to
9 see -- if it was not for our family going over and beyond
10 looking for our sister, following every lead, including the
11 fact that her identity was stolen -- and we followed that
12 and nobody else followed into that and we followed into it.
13 And if we could maybe put up something about identity theft
14 because of missing posters, right, some recommendations
15 of -- of education around prevention of identity theft from
16 missing persons.

17 I'm really hoping the design of this Inquiry
18 is coming from the input from the families such as ourselves
19 to go with this and we would like some support. Especially
20 it's good to see the Women's Network here, here in
21 Membertou. I'm really happy to see the Elders, especially
22 those that are behind me too. I can't see them. You think
23 I -- I would be a mother, "Oh, you got eyes behind your
24 head," but anyway, it's so good to see the Elders here. And
25 what I really like is the fact that we followed protocol in

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1 our cultural ways for healing. Not only that, but we
2 brought in people that are also professionally trained,
3 right, to help those that may be uncomfortable with the
4 traditional ways. When you're going to others, I hope you
5 remember our story, and our story is just one in the
6 thousands.

7 This is Virginia Sue Pictou who was a mother
8 of five children, taken from our family, and our family took
9 the steps to continue to go far and wide to try to find her
10 in any lead to her disappearance. We are beginning to
11 humanize the story a lot more, not only with beaded
12 pictures, but you can see -- come and sit and have a cup of
13 tea with us. (Speaking in Native language.)

14 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** And one thought came
15 up while they asked what can you do for recommendations?
16 First and foremost, you know, if you notice I'm wearing, you
17 know, a piece of moose hide for the moose hide campaign that
18 there's. If you don't know what it is, look it up online.
19 We don't have that time right now.

20 But what I would like the Commissioners
21 to -- to look into is funding for men who self-identify as
22 abusers. Currently, the way it is right now, men will only
23 receive funding if they've been incarcerated. If men need
24 help, let's help them before they actually go and get a
25 court record. That would be my best hope.

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1 Thank you so much for your time,
2 Commissioners. You heard our story.

3 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** So if we want to adjourn
4 this matter -- conclude? I think this --

5 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU JR:** Your turn.

6 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Your turn.

7 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** No mic. Wow,
8 *merci*. (Speaking in French language 11:39:08.) Oh, you're
9 asking? You're proposing? Not here. You're red. You
10 know what you did to me earlier with your dad?

11 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS:** Yeah.

12 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Et voila.

13 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Karma.

14 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Karma.

15 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** He did it to me too.
16 Double karma.

17 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** *Merci* so
18 much. Thank you, thank you, thank you to all of you. It
19 was -- you made me cry. You made me laugh. You made me
20 travel in your memories, experience, stories, what you
21 went -- what you did with your sister and it was amazing
22 the way you shared to us and I hope that people who are
23 listening, that they had that same experience, that same
24 feeling. It was just like sitting there, okay, okay? *Non*,
25 every piece of me were like -- how do we say (speaking in

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1 French language 11:40:22) in English --

2 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** To enjoy.

3 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Enjoy. You
4 made me cry. You made me laugh and you made me
5 also -- that frustration, madness, because we've heard many
6 families say, "We had to dig. We had to look. We had to
7 do our own investigation. We had to fundraise because
8 nobody was there for us. The system wasn't there for us,"
9 so we hear that more and more and more across Canada.

10 Your story, it's a gift for this Inquiry and
11 I have personally and professionally to honour it. I have
12 and I know Qajaq, she can say it, that we have to honour
13 this.

14 Also, we have to remember for Canadian what
15 you shared to us about the experience in the residential
16 schools. Sixty years later, the trauma is still there, the
17 scared or the effect, the impact, and it's something that
18 all our grandfathers, fathers are being through still
19 today, grandmothers, mothers, so it's -- your story
20 resonate all the -- the cause that we're examining and
21 another reason why we have to -- and we -- we are honouring
22 your beautiful message.

23 Also, all the -- the work that you did for
24 educating the people. Many years ago you remember, they
25 were just numbers, statistics, and they even tried to

56 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
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1 dilute our stolen sisters in a broader, you know,
2 statistic/ numbers, so it looks like Canada, "It doesn't
3 happen here, or that much." So because of your work, your
4 passion, your involvement and your dedication, now our
5 faceless doll have faces, have names, dreams, passion, so
6 that is because of you, so thank you so much.

7 And if we can receive for this Inquiry the
8 good work that you did to educate so we can tell the rest
9 of the world and Canada these are simple examples that
10 people did locally, but it made a big change. And that
11 change needs to happen at home, of course, and in Canada.
12 So I was so proud to be there and listen and have all those
13 feelings because of you and -- excuse me -- they're so
14 beautiful also. You're not the only one.

15 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** So --

16 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** And we will
17 make sure that we will keep it -- how -- how did you
18 say -- humanize the stories. That's my commitment as a
19 Commissioner, as a mother, a grandmother, also a family
20 member. I love you. *Merci beaucoup.*

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I want to
22 thank you for welcoming me. I was with another family and
23 when we concluded and I heard you were continuing, I asked
24 if I could join to hear the recommendations. And you've
25 shared a little bit with me about Virginia when we've had

57 Robert Pictou Sr, Francis
Pictou, Robert Pictou Jr, Agnes Gould and Marie Pictou
In relation to Virginia Sue Pictou Noyes

1 opportunities while we've eaten this week to talk. And
2 all -- all these are recorded and transcribed and we'll be
3 going back and I look -- I won't be able to have this
4 conversation with you, but to read more about her.

5 On the first day, you shared with me the
6 beadwork of that photo and now I see the photo and it just
7 blows my mind, the likeness. And to honour her one bead at
8 a time is just so -- it resonated with me because I -- I
9 see the work of the Inquiry like collecting all the little
10 beads and creating that piece that humanizes, that shows
11 Canada who Virginia was, who Anna Mae was. And since day
12 one, beads keep showing up for you and me, so when the
13 beads showed up with you, I said, "Oh, here, here. It's
14 another teaching coming."

15 So I just want to thank you and -- and I
16 hear your recommendations, particularly these ideas of
17 borders, these borders that have separated, divided
18 nations, separated families in the U.S. and Canada, even
19 within Canada the borders between, you know, what they
20 say -- call Nova Scotia, what they call New Brunswick,
21 Quebec, and too many borders for too long. So I just want
22 to say thank you. Thank you for sharing.

23 So to honour the gift you've given us, we
24 want to present you each with a gift.

25 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** It's in French.

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1 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** So the first
2 gift is -- is from the matriarchs of the Haida Gwaii
3 Nation, who collected eagle feathers to give to families
4 and survivors. We are -- it's from the matriarchs, the
5 Haida Gwaii. We -- we are just the carriers of it, so
6 eagle feathers for each of you. And then packets of seeds
7 as a -- as a small gift that can grow into something
8 bigger.

9 **(SHORT PAUSE)**

10 **MS. AGNES GOULD:** Thank you. This feather,
11 I hold for the family. I am just a caretaker and
12 (indiscernible) wela'lin from the Elders. Wela'lin.

13 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Thank you.

14 **(MUSICAL PRESENTATION)**

15 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** So, Mr.
16 Registrar -- hello, Mr. Registrar, if we can conclude or
17 adjourn that matter?

18 **Exhibits (code: POP04P0301)**

19 **Exhibit 1:** Digital folder of images displayed on
20 monitors during public hearing

21 --- Upon recessing at 11:53 a.m.

22 --- Upon reconvening at 1:54 p.m.

23 **Hearing # 2**

24 **Witness: Vanessa Brooks (In relation to Tanya Brooks)**

25 **Heard by Commissioner Qajaq Robinson**

1 **Commission Counsel: Jennifer Cox**

2 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Boo.

3 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Hi.

4 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Hey. So I'm Vanessa
5 Brooks. Who are you?

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Qajaq
7 Robinson.

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Nice to meet you.

9 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Nice to meet
10 you.

11 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** This is an honour.

12 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** For me as
13 well.

14 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** So I -- I think that we
15 probably should give just a little touch to what just
16 happened.

17 Growing up, the -- I'm a family member to
18 Tanya Brooks or, as I know her, Tanya Jean. My sister was
19 murdered in Halifax on May 11, 2009. She was 36 years old.
20 She was my big sister. She's my only sister. So growing
21 up that was one of my sister's and I song and I -- I felt
22 that it was more fitting in our setting to -- to bring
23 Tanya here and that was my way -- one of my ways to -- to
24 bring her to your attention and for you to realize that as
25 much as Tanya is a [sic] Aboriginal woman that was

1 murdered, she was also a person, and so we're
2 (indiscernible). We're wearing our matching shirts, so I
3 think it's only fair that we -- we -- I explain why I
4 choose to do this setting a little bit different than the
5 way it's been.

6 And watching some of the stories that were
7 presented and how things were set up, it just kind of hit
8 me that the whole concept of why we wanted this National
9 Inquiry and why we needed our voices heard from all of our
10 families that are left behind to pick up these pieces means
11 that we all have to collectively come together and close
12 bridges and gaps and when I seen the stage set the way it
13 was, I felt that we were putting a separation and a
14 division between you and I. And in order for you to
15 understand my story, to feel my story, and to hear about my
16 sister, I needed you to be humanized as well. And from a
17 family's perspective, I need to recognize that, yes, you
18 are here as a Commissioner for the Inquiry; however, I need
19 you to know that I recognized that you're First Nations and
20 you're a female --

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I'm female,
22 but I'm not --

23 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- sorry -- female, but
24 not First Nations, that you're with the First Nations.
25 Thank you for the correction.

1 So in our territory, in the way
2 we -- we -- the way we speak, I didn't want any more
3 division. So closing the gap with -- with the people that
4 are here for me, they're also here for you, but I wanted us
5 to have an honest *#nofilter* conversation because that's
6 what this is. We need to be real. I need you to be real,
7 and that's the reason why I gifted you the shirt that I
8 did. And I believe that that's the only way that this is
9 going to move forward and get the momentum for the rest of
10 the Canadians in this country to see because I recognize
11 that you're real. I recognize that you are a person and
12 that you're not just here with a title. With that
13 being said, don't think that I expect any less of your job.

14 So I think the only way that this is going
15 to work is we're here. We're comfy, and we're cosy, and we
16 need to have the same type of conversation as if it was
17 just you and I sitting at home talking, so there I ask you
18 the hard questions. With the same respect, I need you to
19 ask me the same hard questions and be mindful of -- of
20 my -- and be mindful of my support people, that I have
21 given them full permission as well to ask you the hard
22 questions. And with the respect of asking you those hard
23 questions, it's all just about truth. And in order for the
24 truth to be conveyed the way it needs to be conveyed, I
25 need you to be real and I need you to have *#nofilter*. Are

1 we good?

2 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** We're good.

3 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Good.

4 So now that we covered that, wow, let's see.
5 What do you want to know?

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I'd like to
7 know more about Tanya.

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Oh, that's -- that's an
9 open-ended question, you know. There's so much to know
10 about Tanya.

11 Tanya was the oldest of four kids. She was
12 my big sister. There was four of us in our family, two
13 boys, two girls. So it went Tanya, and then myself. We
14 have a brother that's Stan, Jr., and our baby brother,
15 Jason. Of course, my mother and my father.

16 And we -- we grew up in Millbrook First
17 Nations in Truro. It wasn't pretty, you know. It
18 was -- it was not horribly bad. We had hiccups, I guess,
19 but I'm a realist, so I believe -- and I've yet met anyone
20 in this world that isn't damaged goods.

21 We're all damaged in one way, shape or form
22 and, with that being said, I love my dad. I love my dad,
23 but my dad had his battles. He battled -- he battled with
24 alcohol and that was a struggle that he had for most of my
25 life, so a part of us growing up was drunken episodes.

1 Sometimes when dad used to get drunk, there was violence
2 and those weren't always pretty. And Tanya being the
3 oldest, you know, she was relied on being the one to take
4 care of the younger ones and, of course, the baby, typical
5 for a boy, trust me, he was more high maintenance than
6 anyone because he's the baby, you know, so, of course, he
7 does no wrong and we all took flack for that growing up.
8 It was either the oldest or it was the youngest and us, the
9 ones that were stuck in the middle, we -- middle children
10 syndrome.

11 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Taking orders
12 from the older kids --

13 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** There we go.

14 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** -- changing
15 diapers, taking care --

16 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Absolutely. And the
17 baby doesn't have to do anything, now does he? No. So,
18 you know, that was kind of always just the way it was
19 growing up with -- in our home.

20 And at that time my mother, Connie -- my
21 mother wasn't a drinker and mom always had -- she always
22 had us. She -- you know, she was your typical mom that
23 took care of us, you know. She worked. She was -- she
24 played in the choir, you know, in the church. She ran the
25 bingo hall in our community. She helped organize

1 our -- total brain fart there -- summer games and our bingo
2 hall. You know, at the time we had -- we didn't have what
3 we have now. We had a different variation of bingos, so
4 she was a part that facilitated with that, so she was
5 active. She was a registered nurse, an accountant. You
6 know, she -- she had her accomplishments. And she had four
7 rowdy kids, so, you know, we -- we kept her on her toes.

8 We had this big huge tree in our -- in our
9 front yard and it's ironic because it's the hugest tree and
10 where we -- where we live in our community -- where we
11 live, the left side of us, our neighbours, is the cemetery
12 and we have one, two, three other houses with other Elders
13 that are behind us. We never really got much trick or
14 treaters.

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** They'd avoid
16 the cemetery.

17 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** At all costs and yet,
18 funny as it was, that was our playing ground. We had no
19 problem hanging out with the dead people over there. We'd
20 have some pretty good conversations. Mind you, they were
21 pretty one-sided, but, you know, and -- and between her and
22 the boys, they -- they would scare us pretty good, you
23 know.

24 We used to climb this tree and we were
25 notoriously known for kids that -- we acted like monkeys

1 and we had this competition where you'd climb and you'd
2 climb and, you know, she would do this and then, of course,
3 I might be slightly competitive, so I had to go higher and
4 then, of course, boys being boys, "No, I can top both of
5 you," so, you know, you're mounting up this tree to -- to
6 kind of, you know, beat each other.

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** It was kind of what
9 I -- and I think everyone experiences that with their
10 siblings and their families. So -- so, yeah, I got
11 the -- I got the tallest. In the end, I won, and so -- so
12 that was kind of, you know, how it was on the good sides of
13 us growing up.

14 Because dad -- dad was a functioning
15 alcoholic and so he, the majority of the time, drank on
16 weekends and some of the times it was okay and some other
17 times it wasn't okay and it resulted, at that time, very
18 early on that he lost his battle and -- and continued to
19 drink harder and that resulted into my mom usually being
20 the one to take the brunt of his crankiness, let's just
21 say. And -- and then she -- she's a fighter, so she fought
22 back, you know, but unfortunately it was us kids that paid
23 the price, whether it be that dad had gone on one of his
24 binges and mom had to go sequester us to a room and -- and
25 lock us into the room, that's what she did. And

1 unfortunately some of those times resulted in various
2 weather elements, so we had to -- we had to climb out the
3 window to go outside to use the washroom and it wasn't
4 always necessarily spring or summer. There were times
5 where it turned into the winter.

6 So starting in our life as children, it
7 was -- it was challenging and at that point what we know
8 now as Mi'kmaw Family wasn't something that was
9 implemented. It was known as Children's Services or
10 white -- white welfare. And -- and then once that
11 happened, we knew things were wrong because of the way that
12 the child protection services, white welfare, had operated
13 then is vastly different than the way it is now.

14 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Now, it's run
15 by -- now it's run by the community, like --

16 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** No --

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** -- Mi'kmaw
18 Family Services?

19 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- no. It's still, I
20 believe, a federally-funded program --

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Okay.

22 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- so they have federal
23 regulations which just really need to be thrown out the
24 door because it's not working. And I know that there is
25 some references within the Jordan Principle, but the

1 accountability is not going where it needs to be and we
2 will touch on that, so make sure that you remember to have
3 that conversation again.

4 And so anyways it just sucked. It sucked
5 really bad and it resulted in one parent that was an
6 alcoholic and one parent that didn't, and that resulted in
7 us being put into foster care. And we went into the
8 system. Tanya got -- Tanya, Jason -- because she was the
9 oldest and the baby, they were placed locally, but not
10 locally, and together luckily at the time. And then my
11 other brother and I, we got separated and I got put
12 out -- out in the middle of nowhere literally. There was
13 like a dirt road and it was horrible because I ran away
14 from it. I ran away because my dad's mom is -- is my
15 grandmother and my dad's grandmother, she's my world. God
16 rest her soul, she was my -- she was my everything. She is
17 my everything. And whether I was nine or whether I was 10,
18 12, 13, 20, it didn't -- I wasn't doing the normal things
19 and it's the opposite of what Tanya was. Tanya was stuck
20 at home. I didn't. I ran to my grandmother's.

21 You know, there was a time where we
22 did -- my dad had been drunk and we were -- we were locked
23 in her -- their bedroom and -- you know, so that my mother
24 could protect us. And going outside in the middle of
25 winter to go pee and I'm standing around the corner of the

1 house, you know, and it just hit me, "What am I doing? I
2 can go see my gram." And no shoes and then I'd count
3 on -- I'd run down the road and I'd knock on my
4 grandmother's door and without question she opened the
5 door. And the reason I tell you that is because that's my
6 mom -- that's my mom. My grandma was my -- my mom. She's
7 my everything. And so mom would just, "Ah, drinking?"
8 "Yeah," and so she just knew. And that was her son, so she
9 just knew. And you know, "Where's the other kids?" "I
10 don't know." "Why am I staying outside to pee outside? I
11 got a nice warm bed," and that's what mom would do. She'd
12 just open the door and she -- it's not she wouldn't do it
13 with the rest of the kids. It's just no one had the idea
14 to say, "Hey, why are we doing this?" you know.

15 And so when we got placed into care, she
16 wasn't a consideration.

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** They didn't
18 even think about you going?

19 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah, she's old, yet no
20 matter what her age was, she clothed me and she fed me.
21 She loved me. She -- she gave me the one amazing gift that
22 I, today, have that I can give to my children and to my
23 grandchildren. And she loved me unconditionally through my
24 rights, through my wrongs, through my goods and through my
25 bads, and the reason why I share that with you is I believe

1 that that was the one thing -- and I don't know why
2 it -- it didn't happen for her, but that's the one thing my
3 sister didn't get. She never got that feeling. She never
4 felt -- no matter how many times you'd tell -- you told
5 her, "I love you," and -- and I love her, no matter the
6 mistakes, because that's what we need to make. We need to
7 make mistakes so that we can learn from them, but we need
8 to know that making mistakes doesn't equate to love
9 because --

10 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Or the love
11 being taken away.

12 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Exactly. So, you
13 know -- because the last time I checked, love doesn't come
14 with a price tag and if it does, it shouldn't and -- and it
15 shouldn't equate to sexually -- sexually innuendos. It
16 shouldn't be, "Oh, that boy loves me, you know," because he
17 loves her, you know. And with Tanya, throughout Tanya's
18 life, that was one of her biggest struggles is --

19 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Finding love?

20 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- finding the love,
21 you know. And -- and a part of finding that love was
22 understanding that the love had to do with the person and
23 it didn't equate to our sexual beings as women and as -- as
24 girls and later in life as -- as women. So throughout the
25 in and outs of our childhood, it's been in and out of the

1 system.

2 I mean there's times I remember going down
3 on Willow Street in Truro and it's the white building and
4 that building was notoriously known for -- known as the
5 white welfare office, so God forbid if there was anybody
6 from our community that -- that the car was known or seen
7 because then everybody knew. Even though it was off
8 reserve, you still knew it and that's where we had to have
9 our family meetings, so they would collectively bring us in
10 from our foster homes and put us --

11 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Is that for
12 like visitations?

13 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- for our visitations.
14 It was never done kind of the way they're doing it now
15 because it's not done completely the way it should be. And
16 so it was -- it played hard on all of us. It's created a
17 sense of division and -- and definitely I think it's one of
18 the starting points of -- of the breakdown of us as a
19 family. And as hard as my mother tried to -- to do her job
20 protecting us against something that I know -- I'd like to
21 believe she didn't ask for and certainly didn't deserve.

22 So then you fast track and -- and that had
23 been a part of our life and it had been a continuous in and
24 out, mind you, we did have a good point. My mother finally
25 divorced my father and that was -- and I hate saying it as

1 a good point, but she finally -- she finally stepped up and
2 took that initiative and even then she still wasn't
3 drinking and that was okay, you know. I guess it was kind
4 of normal, not that I really know what normal is, but that
5 was a good normal.

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** The separating
7 was normal?

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah, the good
9 separation was -- was normal and, you know, I think
10 we -- we needed -- we needed her to be the one to say that
11 what -- what dad was doing to us isn't normal. So we
12 separated and dad, you know -- she moved us right out of
13 the house and we moved into apartments, you know, Tanya and
14 I, and she did well. You know, she did well without it and
15 at that point she still wasn't drinking.

16 And then --

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** And you
18 guys -- she got you guys back?

19 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** She got us back, you
20 know, so it was -- unfortunately, it was a yo-yo.

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

22 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** You know, dad was doing
23 good. She did what she needed or whatever their
24 requirements were to bring us home, then we come home and
25 then here we go again, you know, and that was the

1 repetitiveness of the behaviour, you know, that kind of
2 started. Some part of me remembers, some part of me
3 doesn't because I was -- I was fortunate. I got sheltered
4 as much from that part of life because I got to be with my
5 grandmother. Tanya was the one that got left behind.

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

7 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** So even though we were
8 two -- we were sisters and raised in the same home, our
9 similarities in the things that we needed crucially when we
10 were being raised changed, and I didn't know that then like
11 I know it now. Seeing it now, I can see that. I couldn't
12 see that then.

13 And so eventually it got to the point where
14 my mother decided to start drinking because she did go back
15 to my father and then the beatings started again and it
16 come down to -- you know, I think she said, "If you can't
17 beat them -- if you can't beat it, might as well join
18 them," and then that just created more division and more
19 damage without realizing that that's what it was doing to
20 us.

21 So then eventually -- so let's -- then, you
22 know, as -- as we've grown and, you know, Tanya, she
23 dipped. When my mother was still working and not drinking
24 as heavily -- she started off as a social
25 drinker -- we -- we joined cadets, you know. She was in

1 cadets and I was in cadets and, you know, it was a good
2 face. I had hoped that she'd stuck it through. I stuck it
3 out a little bit longer because I -- I thrived on that
4 structure and she started to enjoy it and then she got
5 afraid of it. And then let's introduce boys.

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** So you guys
7 are teenagers by this time?

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** By about that point,
9 you know, we've -- we are getting into that -- that teenage
10 years and she was more interested in boys than I was. They
11 were still just "Ew." No, I'd rather knit, or I'd rather
12 sew, or I'd rather learn how to bake, and those were the
13 things that I would get from my grandmother, you know.
14 Whether it's sit there and watch "Another World" with her,
15 I was completely in my element, you know. Tanya, on the
16 other hand, was, "Oh, My God, isn't he gorgeous?" "Ew,
17 no," and that was kind of how it went. So we were sisters
18 in those senses, but I was still behind, you know, and she
19 was a little bit ahead and I think that for me is kind of
20 when things started to change.

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** In your
22 relationship or in her life?

23 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** In -- in both.

24 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

25 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** In both. If I sit here

1 and told you that she was perfect, would you believe me?

2 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** If I sat here
3 and told you I was perfect, would you believe me?

4 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Hell, no.

5 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Good.

6 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Thank you. So I don't
7 want to -- to sit here and give that illusion because she
8 wasn't perfect and our relationship wasn't perfect. Our
9 relationship was very tumultuous. I don't know because,
10 you know, Tanya's not here with us, so I -- I don't know
11 whether it was because resentment because I choose a family
12 escape, and that was my grandmother, you know. She was
13 left behind, you know, so I don't know that would have been
14 the (indiscernible) of -- of the beginning of our
15 tumultuous relationship that just amplified over the years.

16 And Tanya ended up -- and December 10th, she
17 gave birth to her first daughter, Chelsey. She was 16.
18 But even just before Tanya had Chelsey, I had been working
19 for somebody in the family -- because she never graduated.
20 So by this point -- let me backtrack.

21 By that point, we're talking Tanya was 16
22 when she was pregnant, so I was almost 15. There's two
23 years between us, 14, 15. And mom's drinking started
24 increasing, so then she was following in the same pattern
25 as my dad. So, you know, you're looking at trying grade

1 6 -- you know, five/six, and I've got to study for a math
2 test, "Hey, get me a beer." Which do you do? "Mom, I'm
3 supposed to be studying for a math test. That's your job
4 that you should be letting me do that," but, no, me going
5 to get her a beer was more important. And because the
6 relationship with my grandmother -- it -- it was -- it was
7 very close, so again I think that solidified the separation
8 between my mother and I and the relationship between my
9 morning and Tanya were very tight and extremely close.
10 They were two peas in a pod.

11 So we had taken off to -- Tanya, she wanted
12 to go to Toronto, so we took off to Toronto. We hitchhiked
13 to Toronto. And Tanya is just the impulsive one. "There's
14 a boy there. I want to go." "Oh, My God. How are we
15 supposed to go? I got -- you know, you got no money."
16 Like we knew danger existed, but, you know, like you're
17 not -- she just never thought those things. She just
18 wanted to go, she wanted to go and I'm the one that goes,
19 "Well, let me figure this out. Okay, I know you want to do
20 it, so what are we going to do?"

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

22 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** And I'd been working
23 and I quit the job and I saved my paycheque because she was
24 pregnant and we're hitchhiking. Mind you, it was the best
25 trip ever, you know, and we were kind of careful, I guess.

1 You know, we got lucky with the truck drivers that picked
2 us up, but we'd already made the pact that, "If you need to
3 sleep, I'm staying awake," and vice versa and we'd sit on
4 the same chair, so we were -- there was never a risk that
5 way. She was always mindful of the risks even if she had a
6 butter knife. I don't know if that would have done
7 anything, but at least she felt she was empowered, right,
8 and vice-versa. Of course, I was scared holding it more so
9 than she was, but she says I'm to do it, I'm going to do
10 it. That's my big sister, right?

11 And so we made it to Toronto and even in
12 Toronto it was really hard for Tanya. She ended up getting
13 raped and I ended up, you know, not knowing what to do.
14 We're living on the streets in Toronto.

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** How long were
16 you guys in Toronto?

17 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** I think we must have
18 spent almost -- almost six months.

19 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Did you know
20 anybody there? No?

21 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** No, and the guy
22 that -- the boyfriend, the baby's father, that she went to
23 go see, he was in a house ten minutes west of Bloor
24 and -- and on Edmund Street and it was very close to the
25 subway. We must have arrived at one o'clock in the

1 morning. We barely had enough to get the subway to -- to
2 get to his place because that's where we were supposed to
3 go. He had been out at the time. And it was shortly after
4 that that he ended up getting arrested and put into jail.

5 So here we are, stuck in a boarding
6 house -- in a boarding room, just her and I, which she
7 was -- she had that street sense that I didn't. You know,
8 I was -- I was very naive in that -- that sense, so
9 whatever my sister said, I believed and I trusted in it
10 and, unfortunately, so much so that Tanya had convinced me
11 that -- at the time -- and I'm glad we've improved since
12 then, but -- in our society, but at that point she had me
13 really terrified of black people. It was just horrible.
14 "Don't look at them. They'll kill you. (Unreportable
15 sound), head down." And -- and I know she was doing it to
16 protect me. And, unfortunately, on the stem of me coming
17 up from the subway one day, there was a black -- a black
18 gentleman that was staring at me and I must have looked at
19 him too long and I put my head down because he was just
20 sitting there and he just started waving profusely and I
21 got scared and I panicked. I took one step off the
22 platform of the subway station and I got hit by a bus.

23 Unbeknownst, Tanya had no idea what had
24 happened to me and, unfortunately, during that time I had
25 no idea that she was in another hospital -- another

1 hospital because she was raped.

2 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Was it a
3 random attack or by somebody she knew?

4 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** I -- I think it
5 was -- it's not so much it was -- I mean the act itself was
6 random to a certain degree, but I think that she knew the
7 individual just through kind of associations and so that
8 really traumatized her, so much so that she called mom and
9 she said, "Mom, I want to come home," so we come back home.

10 So then, you know, we got back home and she
11 gave birth to Chelsey and, you know, that kind of life, I
12 figured she's out of that kind of lifestyle like now.
13 Then, you know, she started getting into the drinking.

14 You know, she had her daughter. She -- she
15 tried to be the mother, but because her -- because of her
16 relationship with mom, mom's the one that took care of that
17 responsibility, so there's no accountability there. You
18 know, she could have this baby and somebody else to help
19 take care of it, so, you know, it started there and then
20 Tanya's now 16 and then I'm pregnant.

21 I'm pregnant with -- I found out that I was
22 pregnant with my -- my firstborn, my son, and that's when
23 things started happening between Tanya and then social
24 services got involved because she wasn't taking care -- or
25 she would go off on little trips, so she started picking up

1 that lifestyle again. And again I think you understand
2 where the concept of what she was looking for. At the
3 time, I couldn't see it, but that's what it was. And then
4 getting into that lifestyle, she was just searching for the
5 same thing we all are. We're just searching for somebody
6 to love us and to love us with the -- the capacity
7 of -- through our rights and through our wrongs, through
8 our goods and our bads, and you're not going to always
9 necessarily get that from family, you know.

10 So then, you know, I know we're on such
11 limited times in that conversation, you know. Tanya ended
12 up having four other more kids and they ended up resulting
13 in social services and by this point it had switched over
14 from it being about white welfare and they started
15 integrating Mi'kmaw Family Services, and that's just a
16 joke. It's seriously a joke.

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Just a change
18 in name?

19 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** It's literally just a
20 change in name. You know, I think that there's -- they now
21 have more federal regulations and restrictions that are in
22 place that are tying a lot of the social workers' hands. I
23 find that -- I think that if you want to do this job right,
24 then you need to be listening to the families. I think
25 that you need to have that type of transparency. I don't

1 think that you should hold things against family members if
2 they've had like time to kind of -- what's the word I'm
3 looking for --

4 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** If they've changed?
5 They've changed their behaviour and not look in the past?

6 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Right, so having that
7 change in that behaviour.

8 I lost custody of my son for that one moment
9 and it's not about me, but it is about me to a certain
10 degree. My -- my son's father was extremely abusive
11 and -- and I might have dabbled at that point. It was my
12 first time into addictions, which wasn't the same way
13 Tanya's was. Tanya's was different. Mine was different.
14 Mine was he's beating the shit out of me. He's punching me
15 in my stomach at five months pregnant. It's not that I
16 wanted to get high. You could turn around and punch me in
17 the head and put me in a coma so that it's done and over
18 with. It was more for the escapism aspect of it than the
19 high or the -- the rush of it. For Tanya, it was always
20 chasing the high.

21 So when I had lost custody, my son was very
22 little. (Indiscernible) until now, I guess he never
23 really -- you know, much later in life -- he didn't find
24 out that part of my life because that was my job to keep
25 that from him, that's where I made that choice for the dent

1 of anger to end. I didn't want what was done to us to
2 continue with my children.

3 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Did you just
4 call it the dents of anger?

5 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** It's the dents of anger
6 and in order to finally end that because it's the
7 transition of -- of our parents --

8 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

9 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- that I had -- you
10 know, I had a choice and I don't think my sister had the
11 same choice. I had a choice to -- you can choose to do
12 this willingly or we're coming to do this.

13 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** We being child
14 services?

15 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Right. At this point,
16 it was Mi'kmaw Family, which is a big difference because if
17 it was white welfare, there's no question. As soon as
18 there was a knock on the door, the children were
19 apprehended. Not much of -- of that had changed except for
20 that part of their mandate, which they actually had you
21 come in and have a conversation unless, of course, it's a
22 risk factor, then there's no -- no discussion; right? At
23 this point, it wasn't. It was a concern and so they did.
24 They took my son. And the only reason why I'm sharing that
25 with you is because losing him invited my own

1 demons -- because I didn't know how to get out of that.
2 I'm 16 years old, trying to figure out that I'm accountable
3 to somebody else's life. That bit me in the ass later in
4 life. I couldn't get custody of my -- my sister's kids
5 when she was murdered.

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Because your
7 son had been apprehended?

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah. It's like even
9 then and even now, it's like wearing a scarlet letter. I
10 carry that and I don't know. It's like it's that -- what's
11 the word? It's like that hidden -- it's an agenda -- it's
12 not agenda. It's -- come on, guys, words. Anybody?

13 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Cause?

14 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yes, exactly.

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** What did he
16 say?

17 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Underlying cause.

18 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Underlying
19 cause? Okay.

20 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Right? It's that
21 underlying cause of -- of -- it's -- it's there --

22 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

23 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- and I'm not -- I'm
24 unbeknownst that she's got it in her file, so because she's
25 got it hypothetically not you, but she's got it in her

1 file --

2 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** It follows you
3 everywhere?

4 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- it seems to be
5 following me everywhere and that is -- you've just
6 screwed -- Tanya left five kids behind. I've been raising
7 these kids since she was pregnant. At some point, in and
8 out of her life, I was taking care of that responsibility
9 along with my own responsibilities and for them to say
10 that, no, I can't have those kids when that's the last part
11 I have of my sister, that's why I shared that. And I'm not
12 proud of it and I've learned not to be ashamed of it
13 because being ashamed means that he wins, that it's okay
14 for him to make me feel less of a person.

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Who's him?
16 You don't want to go there?

17 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** No, I can go there.
18 He's just the sperm donor that gave me my beautiful son --

19 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Okay.

20 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- and why should I
21 give him that entitlement?

22 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

23 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** He's my son. I put
24 that work in. He's mine and I -- so with -- and this
25 is -- you're learning through all of this. I'm not going

1 to put -- I'm putting my recommendations in the
2 conversations that we're having --

3 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

4 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- and I'm hoping
5 everybody else is catching the same thing that you are,
6 so -- because I believe that this is the way, the honest
7 way that you're going to hear what needs to be said in the
8 senses of recommendations.

9 So then you take that out of the picture.
10 Let's move along and, you know, Tanya -- Tanya loses the
11 kids. Well, I did -- I did whatever I had to do, whatever
12 their requirement was. I fulfilled that and I got my son
13 back. I got my son back long before he even knew
14 that -- it was like kind of a blurb on the map to him
15 because he was just a baby, so he really, thankfully,
16 didn't have to live and feel that unlike Tanya's -- unlike
17 Tanya.

18 She struggled. Like the battle and the
19 requirements and the expectations that Mi'kmaw Family put
20 on that woman were so atrociously stupid and then we wonder
21 why we have the problems that we do now? Something within
22 that particular organization seriously needs a -- that
23 needs a restart, that needs an overhaul, that needs the
24 federal and the provincial government to start looking and
25 focusing, "What can we do to make this better? What can we

1 do to change this?"

2 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** What kind of
3 things were they expecting her to do and did they give her
4 the help to try and meet those expectations?

5 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** You know, she needed to
6 go to addiction services. She needed to get counselling.
7 She needed to stay clean and they're not unreasonable, but
8 it was the way they expected it. Yes, I know you and I are
9 on a time limit. We know that, but in addictions,
10 addictions don't have a time limit, so you have to -- you
11 have to work with that. You have to figure out how to grow
12 with that and help that person to grow with it.

13 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah, meet her
14 where she's at.

15 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Exactly. You know,
16 don't -- don't -- you can't rush that process because
17 rushing it, you're only setting her up to fail and that's
18 exactly what they did. They set her up to fail. They set
19 families up to fail. Out of one -- one out of her five
20 children are with family.

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** One of the
22 five right now?

23 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** One of the five right
24 now. Her -- Chelsey, Victor, Bryce, Shilo. Shilo is with
25 my daughter.

1 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I can't
2 imagine it was easy for her not to have the kids.

3 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** You're a mom.

4 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah, I know.

5 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Can you imagine yours
6 not being with you?

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** No.

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** And that's how it was
9 for her. It was not easy. It was one of her biggest
10 struggles and you can have all this amazing support system;
11 they're holding you. You can lead a horse to water, but
12 you can't make it drink and that was it. You could lead
13 her to it and you could guide her to it, but if -- God, I
14 loved that girl. She just was so stubborn. You always
15 wanted to tell her, "Get your head out of your
16 (unreportable sound) and look at it differently," and so it
17 was never -- and I think that's one thing you need to
18 understand because it gets out there and it's out in the
19 mainstream media and then it filters up again. No one
20 really realizes she was a mother. She was a sister. She
21 was a daughter before she was even my sister. She was a
22 daughter. She was a person. She was -- she was all of
23 this and yet they forget the impact that is on these
24 children.

25 And what was the thing? Do you think that

1 my sister just decided randomly, "Hey, you know what? I
2 think I'm going to be a drunk today. I think I woke up
3 this morning and I -- I decided I -- I want to go be a
4 prostitute. No, actually, I think I want to go do some
5 meth." I don't roll over bed first thing in the morning
6 and think that that's what I'm going to be and that's what
7 I want to be. Things happen.

8 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** It's not a
9 choice.

10 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** It's not a choice and I
11 don't think when our stories get out there, she gets -- she
12 does not get recognized for being a person. Yes, she did
13 make these choices. Where did this come from is the -- is
14 the million dollar question.

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** We talked
16 about it already.

17 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** She didn't have her
18 kids.

19 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

20 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** That was the one thing
21 that made her. That was the one -- that one thing that she
22 was searching so ferociously for and when you took those
23 kids away from her, you took -- you took her whole
24 reasoning to want to live away.

25 So then, you know, we get into -- and we can

1 fast track to various parts of this, but you're getting the
2 general idea of where she ended up going and a part of
3 where she was going, unfortunately, after losing all of the
4 kids, was down a path that I couldn't save her from and
5 that's my job because that's my sister.

6 Everything that she did, I've always tried
7 to find ways to take care of her because she's my sister.
8 No matter how bad or tumultuous our relationship was, she's
9 still my sister. And part of being and going through this
10 is I'm not going to sit here and tell you that I'm healing.
11 I'm not healing. I've had moments that I know it's like a
12 tree. I know the branch is out there and I know when I can
13 go on them, but I can't start it. I've started it
14 maybe -- I can't say I didn't start. It's there. It's
15 just she was murdered and that -- that is it. She was
16 murdered and -- and it's unsolved.

17 So when we go back to -- to what we need to
18 and we bring this back around, Tanya had gone through again
19 various stages of her addictions and still trying to fight,
20 still trying to get clean, going into rehab, coming out of
21 rehab, and I don't know. I don't know, but I'm hoping you
22 hear, because if you hear what I think I hear and what I
23 think I know and I think what everybody around here knows,
24 there is an exponential huge breakdown in mental health
25 services. Trust me, I've lived it. I've seen therapists

1 that look at their client and -- and the worst of it, at a
2 child, and make them feel so bad that they don't want to
3 talk. And my theory is if you're not in your job to do
4 your job, if you don't want to wake up and do what you
5 believe you're trying to do and helping somebody, get the
6 hell out of it because you're doing more harm than you are
7 doing good. And I believe that if our workers are -- are
8 getting so overworked both in the social services and the
9 mental health aspect of -- of the jobs, then you need to
10 break because you're not -- you're no longer helping. And
11 it's the same thing I found with Tanya. She didn't -- she
12 could have used these services and she could have had these
13 services, but if she felt at some point that she wasn't
14 getting what she needed, you're not really helping her, are
15 you? So you -- there -- there we go. We have failure
16 right there.

17 And personally -- my personal opinion for
18 addictions -- I hate to reference it, but I'm going to
19 reference it because it's just what it is. It's Dr. Phil.
20 Dr. Phil, when he takes a -- a client, what does he do when
21 he's trying to help them? He sends them off to the best
22 facilities, Cedar Oaks or whatever it is, and they go and
23 they do this intensive, you know, program, but then there's
24 a transition from that program into a second half, like a
25 tier level, and then another level where it's filtering

1 out, but it's gradually integrating them in a healthy way
2 to get out. We need to figure out how we can take that
3 system and implement it into our cultures and find ways to
4 help our people that -- very obviously, we struggle with
5 those types of addictions that we're saying we need this
6 because whatever's on the board and whatever's out there is
7 not working and we all need to stop thinking it is because
8 it's not.

9 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** And you think
10 it's not working because it doesn't look at things in that
11 sort of like step-by-step tier -- tier?

12 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah, I think --

13 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** You think
14 there's gaps?

15 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Exactly. There's a gap
16 and this is why exactly you are not sitting at the other
17 side of the room and I'm not sitting on the other side of
18 the room because I refuse to put that -- the whole idea of
19 this Inquiry is to close that gap. We made that right
20 here, right now. You and I are closing that gap and that's
21 what we need -- every federal, provincial elected official
22 in this country, from the lowest to the highest tier of
23 government, to start to realize, "What can we do to close
24 this gap and when can we realize that First Nations need to
25 have the same recognition as every nationality in this

1 country?"

2 You -- your blood is no different than my
3 blood. We bleed exactly the same, but God -- by God, if
4 something happened to me and I was murdered, I can
5 guarantee you -- well, no, actually, I can't guarantee you
6 because sitting here now, I have to be hopeful that if
7 something had happened to me, whether I was missing or I
8 was murdered, that the rest of this country would actually
9 start waking up from whatever daze they're sleeping in and
10 say, "Whoa. We need to, as humans, step up and start going
11 out there and see what we can do," because murder doesn't
12 take a break and it's not taking a vacation any time soon.

13 So now we take ourselves back to where
14 Tanya --

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yes, we can.
16 Can we take like a two-minute break -- five minutes -- a
17 five-minute break?

18 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Sure. So, Mr. Registrar,
19 if we could have a break for -- so we're going to take a
20 five-minute break.

21 --- Upon recessing at 2:57 p.m.

22 --- Upon reconvening at 3:33 p.m.

23 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** So we're going
24 to resume our conversation. We were talking about
25 the -- the impacts of Tanya's kids being taken before our

1 break.

2 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Okay, so -- and before
3 we pick up from there, how about you just give me a little
4 bit of -- a little bit of gist of that because we were just
5 saying that we had that conversation, so tell me what is it
6 that you've got so far from what I've said of Tanya that
7 will help me continue our conversation?

8 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** We're talking
9 about how the struggle of -- of getting her kids back and
10 the hurdles she had to face, like the expectations and what
11 she had to do, and it's almost like it was -- what's that
12 term -- like a catch 22, like to get your kids, you have to
13 do this, but to try and do those things to change her life
14 was so hard without her kids, her kids being her purpose in
15 so many ways; right?

16 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah, yeah. So, yeah,
17 I totally agree with you, Qajaq. And then I guess
18 that's -- that's the one thing that I needed you to hear,
19 that that -- and I'm happy that you -- you've remembered
20 that because that's -- that captures -- it's capturing the
21 essence of where -- where Tanya continued to go. And with
22 the loss of those kids, it set the pattern forward that I'd
23 love to say was a perfect pattern, but it -- it was not.
24 It -- it led her down -- I'd like to say it was not so much
25 of a perfect pattern, but it was like the -- the right path

1 and, unfortunately, it's -- it turned out to be the path
2 that led down to a harder road which entailed with her not
3 being with us today.

4 So after, you know, Tanya's into her
5 adulthood, you know, because we -- we were going through
6 kind of -- I'm giving you the gist of -- of the upbringing
7 of our life, you know, so we're -- we're going to fast
8 track in between Tanya being post-teen, mid -- you know,
9 early adult to kind of adult, and she's like, you know, a
10 mom now of five. You know, she mothered five children and
11 now these -- these five kids have been taken away from her
12 and they're -- they're now in the system.

13 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Were they all
14 separated or together?

15 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** They were all together
16 for the most part and then there was abuse within that
17 family that they were placed with. There was a lot of
18 emotional abuse done to the children that I really didn't
19 tolerate, so I made it very well known that these kids are
20 saying to me on visits that they're not happy and they're
21 scared and they're not in a home that I'm supposed to
22 assume is supposed to be better than them being with their
23 mother; then we got a problem. So then that is where it
24 kind of -- they were within -- what is River John from us,
25 20 minute -- 40 minutes?

1 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Thirty minutes.

2 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Thirty minutes? So
3 about 30 minutes away from our community and so then, no,
4 they ended up getting separated.

5 Chelsey went to one family down in
6 Cambridge --

7 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Yeah.

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- and there was a
9 sister, I believe, that took Victor, God rest his soul,
10 which is her second oldest -- her second oldest. And then
11 Bryce went somewhere else. Everybody -- and then -- yes,
12 somewhere else. I can't even tell you where Bryce went.
13 And then Chelsey, Victor, Bryce, Shilo and Qualin were
14 placed at least with family. They were with my -- my
15 brother, Jason, and his wife up until just recently.

16 So now, you know, we -- we know that the
17 impact both of -- of the -- kind of seeing a pattern, don't
18 you think? We're in care, you know. They're in care and
19 we ended having that and -- and I can't tell you -- I
20 didn't know how that existed or why that existed because
21 I -- I couldn't understand it. Even as a -- when I turned
22 to be a mom at 16, I'm still learning. I'm still figuring
23 it out. I'm -- trust me, I'm not 16 now, but I'm still
24 trying to figure out, you know, and -- and that's good
25 because I want to. That's what we need. We need to always

1 constantly want to learn, to strive, to do something. If
2 it's not working -- if this is not working, then I need to
3 try to have another approach that is going to work, so as
4 a -- as a mom and even as a woman and as a person, that's
5 what I tried -- I tried to do. And so with Tanya, I
6 just -- she -- she had the same. To a certain degree, she
7 strived to do those things, especially because they were
8 steaming of -- what's the word? It's not like it was -- it
9 was -- I guess I don't want to say mandated. I don't want
10 to -- maybe their protocols, I guess, within the agency;
11 their -- their --

12 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Their policies
13 or --

14 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Maybe their -- yeah, I
15 guess. In some ways --

16 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Their
17 criteria?

18 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Their -- there, thank
19 you. It's their criterias [sic]. Their criterias seemed
20 to be set in such a damn way that, Good Lord, I'd have to
21 have great jumping legs to jump over each and every one of
22 these -- these hurdles and it's -- it's constantly. It's a
23 hurdle. You can't even get -- get over that hurdle enough
24 to -- and then, you know, there was such a -- a
25 moment -- the momentum of constantly jumping through the

1 hoops and that's how Tanya always felt, that she had to
2 jump through so many hoops for her children and it's not
3 that she didn't try, but with addiction that struggle is
4 real and this tells you how real it was for her and, "You
5 know, you tell me to behave this way. Okay, I'm -- I'm
6 behaving this way." "Well, you know what? You're not
7 quite doing it right. You need to do it this way because
8 that's just not enough," all the while these children were
9 placed at one point in a home that had added to the damage.
10 Now, these children are now damaged, you know, so -- and it
11 still exists, you know, that -- that type of -- hurdles are
12 still existing now and I'm feeling that now.

13 The family feels that now by working with
14 these -- with these agencies, that they need our shirts
15 because they need to start taking the filter out and start
16 getting real and -- and that's what it comes down to. They
17 need to start being real and looking at it, "Yes, I
18 understand you have a mandate and you have policies. At
19 the same time, you need to start -- you need to start
20 humanizing that this -- this family went through this
21 and -- and these children will need this," and I shouldn't
22 have to wait for the federal government to decide that they
23 have \$10 in their pocket and they want to throw it our way.
24 I want to know that that \$10 is in your pocket right now
25 and you're passing it to me. I need tangible -- we need

1 tangible kinds of honest efforts that are within our reach
2 and not something that's ridiculously beyond our reach
3 because that's -- that's one of the problems that happened
4 with Tanya. Every expectation, it just seemed, that she
5 thought was reasonable ended up being non-tangible. It was
6 so far without her reach.

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** That it wasn't
8 help?

9 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** That's not help,
10 exactly, so, you know. What's your thoughts?

11 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I want to hear
12 more about the road, that road it took her down.

13 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** She has many roads, so
14 which road are you looking for?

15 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I do want to
16 hear about what happened in the end and -- but, you know,
17 let's get there.

18 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Oh, she doesn't pull
19 any punches, eh, guys?

20 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Hey, you said
21 tough questions.

22 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah, I did say tough
23 questions, didn't I?

24 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** But I know
25 that, you know, the big picture is so important, so --

1 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** But you're hearing that
2 picture.

3 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I am.

4 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** You're present.

5 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** So you -- you
6 show me which way we're going.

7 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Well, we're going to go
8 down for the tough questions, but before I go down that
9 tough road, you had asked and I've been curious and -- to
10 some of these pictures that have been showing. Where do we
11 see? Where do we look?

12 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** There's a
13 monitor there and then there's a monitor right there.

14 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Okay. So
15 you're -- that one is the one that's out there that has
16 been issued. That's a picture of my sister.

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** By who?

18 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** She was -- that, I
19 believe, is my mother holding her. Am I correct? That
20 looks like my mother's hands.

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

22 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** I actually re-issued
23 that picture in the media because there was one that
24 was -- that was issued into the media that depicted Tanya
25 in such a negative way. She was on something at the time

1 that photo must have been taken and it just did not do her
2 any justice.

3 And that photo, I can tell you because we
4 now no longer have Sears, right, and, of course, Sears
5 Canada was notorious for their portraits. And in that
6 particular picture, which you now see, she -- you can see
7 her smile. You can see who she is and she was healthy.
8 She was sober. She had had her kids, so as you're looking
9 in her face, you're seeing her for her and that she was
10 sober. And then there's, I believe, another photo.

11 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** There.

12 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** That was the one.
13 There's our mother and she -- she was -- she's been
14 carrying the fight for Tanya for seven years to bring
15 Tanya's remains home. Up until then, it was -- I've picked
16 up that fight, so that was one of them that
17 she -- she -- it was taken when she was doing that. And
18 then that's with Chelsey. That's with her girl.

19 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Her oldest
20 girl?

21 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Her only girl.

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

23 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah, it's Chelsey
24 Jean. We call her Chelsey Brat Face. And that's Tanya.
25 That's what Tanya called her, Chelsey Brat Face.

1 And now what do we -- oh, Good Lord. This
2 was actually taken in Ontario, so the -- the little -- the
3 plaid shirt one would be our little brother, Stan, Jr. The
4 one that's in blue, that is Tanya with the short hair.
5 Centred is our mother. Beside her with the really bad hair
6 is me. And the one that looks the happiest and the
7 cheesiest is our baby brother, Jason, and that was taken
8 actually in Tillsonburg, Ontario.

9 This is me and my sister. I'm always taking
10 care of her and I was determined at that point I wanted to
11 be a nurse and I told her, "Sit there. Shut up. Take your
12 beer. I want to take your temperature," because I got the
13 doctor -- I got the doctor kit that year and so she laid
14 there and she -- she placated with me and she -- she played
15 along and she was -- she became my patient and -- and I
16 don't know. I think it's been from that point on, I've
17 always been the one that -- I've always taken care of her
18 and even though she's older, she's free spirited.
19 I'm -- I'm the younger one and I'm not so free spirited.
20 I'm a control freak, so I'm the one that --

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah?

22 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Just maybe a little.
23 And -- and she had known that, you know, throughout
24 our -- our upbringing that I will systematically figure out
25 things and, "I got it. I got it. No, you can't do that."

1 "Oh, get out of the way. Let me do it." That is kind of
2 how I -- I would handle definitely throughout our
3 upbringing. I'm the micromanagement of the family and
4 especially with her. If she wasn't doing something, I
5 would be the first one to -- to tell her.

6 There is Tanya and our mother and Chelsey
7 again with Victor. Now, as much -- and I did have another
8 picture, but I don't know where that one is, and I will
9 show you.

10 Oh, there's my favourite. It was actually
11 taken in my really crappy bathroom in Cole Harbour
12 and -- and if this is the picture that I have -- can have
13 circulated throughout this country, believe that is the
14 one. That is my sister. I think she was trying to steal
15 my hair products and my makeup, but her smile and her whole
16 essence of who I remember her as is wrapped up in that
17 picture. And no matter where and what anybody says about
18 her, that's what I'm seeing and that's -- that's who I
19 remember and I -- and it's not just the public because as a
20 family member, murder divides families and it makes you
21 feel very singular and very left out and you -- you don't
22 have your unity that you should through a tragedy. And
23 because we all deal with grief differently, not all family
24 members necessarily agree with some of us being allowed to
25 have feelings or emotions and so I'm not supposed to hurt

1 and I'm not supposed to feel what I feel because my sister
2 and I had a tumultuous relationship; right? So when that's
3 told to me that's -- that's the picture I go back to or I
4 go back to that song. She was notorious for that
5 and -- and "The Sun Will Come Up Tomorrow." Those were
6 her -- those were our things.

7 So, no, and I want people to know. I want
8 people to see her because when you look at that face and
9 you look at who she is, how could you not want to give a
10 shit about her? How could you tell me that she is less
11 than anybody else in this country? Why? Because she's a
12 little bit browner than us?

13 And I'm doing exactly what I've always done,
14 I'm taking care of her, and I'm doing that now and I'm too
15 stubborn and I'm too headstrong and I'm not going to back
16 down no matter what the costs and, trust me, there's costs
17 and there's risks.

18 So you asked the hard question. Now, she
19 wants to make it real, people.

20 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Only if you're
21 ready.

22 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** So I'm not sure if
23 everybody and certainly not you -- I think before I just do
24 that, I want to -- because I know as soon as I get into
25 certain parts of this, it's -- it's going to be the thing

1 that -- the last little bit of strength that I have right
2 now, it'll be the thing that it'll take it. And I know
3 that my amazing support team here has some points
4 and -- and concerns and some difficult questions that
5 they'd like to address to you. I don't know if they're
6 difficult, but they're -- they're definitely real and
7 they're going to kind of want to bring that awareness to
8 you, to the Commission and -- and to the nation; right?

9 We will start with Doreen. Doreen -- both
10 Doreen and Cathy have -- have worked tirelessly
11 with -- with my mother through -- through this tragedy and
12 I guess I'll just open for everybody to know.

13 So Tanya, she was 36 years old and she was
14 murdered on May -- or she was murdered May 2009. Now, as
15 far as the date goes, she was found May 11th. From what
16 our understanding is, it was May 10th. She died the night
17 of May 10th, which is Mother's Day. And she was found in a
18 window well at St. Alexandra School in Halifax, Nova
19 Scotia, by a daycare worker is what -- she
20 was -- sorry -- a daycare -- a daycare worker that was very
21 close to the window well is who found her -- not found
22 her -- sorry. It was more of, I guess, started.

23 Tanya had been -- the murder had happened
24 and I guess, from what I understand, the way it went was
25 the night before, if I'm correct, mom had got a call from

1 Tanya or that day for Mother's Day -- no, she didn't. She
2 wanted or was expecting a phone call to talk to her. And
3 they're two peas in a pod, so -- and it's -- it's out there
4 that Tanya -- mom would always tell Tanya, "You know, ET,
5 phone home. Phone home." No matter where she was, phone
6 home. And for them not to talk, not to fight at least once
7 a day says it all, you know.

8 So the way -- do we have an idea how deep it
9 was, anybody? Three -- three, four feet down was this
10 window well?

11 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Yeah, it was five or
12 six feet.

13 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Five -- five, six feet
14 down in a -- in a deep window well of -- of the school and
15 it's been -- it's been circulated through the media of
16 where the depth -- the depth of when -- where she was.
17 They needed a ladder to go down just so you have a gist of
18 it.

19 But leading up to just before I continue
20 with that, I just wanted to give you kind of the beginning
21 and -- and we're going to come back to that because there
22 are other events and I'm not sure everybody knew that
23 she -- or you even know that she was experienced -- she was
24 experiencing just prior to this day.

25 So Doreen had made a very strong point

1 that -- and brought it to my attention. I -- I wasn't
2 aware to -- more -- I guess it may have happened more after
3 our mother's death because our mother -- I'm sorry. Our
4 mother passed away two years ago this September and it was
5 just within that time after her death that I was starting
6 to hear more because mom never really, you know, shared
7 that with us and I -- I wasn't really mindful, so you're
8 going to have to excuse my ignorance on that because I just
9 didn't honestly know much about it.

10 But I guess from what Doreen was telling me,
11 my mother was a survivor to the residential school and that
12 that's something that she -- she would know more about in
13 that sense, so I guess that just -- the reason why we
14 mention that is because that -- that's the systematic
15 breakdown and that kind of gives you again --

16 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** That pattern?

17 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Exactly, the pattern
18 that's there and -- and a little bit more understanding of
19 how and why everything translated and transpired the way it
20 did.

21 And Cathy and both Doreen at the time
22 of -- of that -- that Tanya was found, they will -- you
23 know, I'm going to make references back to them.

24 So we all know now the day when she was
25 murdered.

1 Now, just prior to May, I believe it
2 was -- it was a year --

3 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** 2008, you're talking
4 about when --

5 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yes.

6 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** -- the assault happened?

7 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yes.

8 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah.

9 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** So 2008. Do we know
10 what month?

11 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** It says March of 2008.

12 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Okay. So as we had
13 previously talked about or just touched on, we both learned
14 that you're not perfect and I'm not perfect, so we
15 certainly can't expect Tanya to be perfect; right?
16 And -- and a part of this, she had -- she's finally made
17 that transition to Halifax, so now she's into Halifax and
18 she's living into [sic] the city. And at this point
19 because of the tumultuous relationship between my sister
20 and I, and certain circumstances that -- that led her not
21 so much within my life at the time, and with that being
22 said, that even though she wasn't in my life at the time,
23 I -- I had known -- I had known this particular situation
24 had happened and she's still family; right?

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

1 MS. VANESSA BROOKS: And so in March --

2 MS. JENNIFER COX: March of 2008?

3 MS. VANESSA BROOKS: March 2009.

4 MS. JENNIFER COX: So sentencing was --

5 MS. VANESSA BROOKS: 2008.

6 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yeah.

7 MS. JENNIFER COX: Yeah, the assault

8 happened in 2008.

9 MS. VANESSA BROOKS: '08.

10 MS. JENNIFER COX: He was sentenced in -- in

11 2009.

12 MS. VANESSA BROOKS: Thank you, Jen. I am
13 going to read this to you; however, I will not -- not
14 because it's not here and it's not accessible for anybody
15 to want to find out who, but who I am and the way I feel
16 about this, I am not justifying that with a name. I'm not
17 doing it. He doesn't deserve that.

18 So at this point Tanya was living in Halifax
19 and she's still working through and trying to figure out
20 her battles and I think even some part of her mind that she
21 thought she still might have a chance with her -- of
22 hopefully gaining back custody of the two younger ones, you
23 know, because the other ones have started to grow up. And
24 so in between her trying and whatnot, she got into the drug
25 trade, you know, and obviously both for employment as well

1 as, you know, access for her own use. And I can't tell you
2 because we lived two different lifestyles, but she
3 came -- encountered with this particular individual who
4 became her drug dealer.

5 And just to give you a general idea, Tanya
6 was about -- I can't even -- I'd say she's not much taller
7 than me and I like to lie. I try to say I'm five-seven,
8 but that's just in heels, so Tanya was probably about five-
9 eight, almost five-nine, an additional inch, and she was
10 about a 130 pounds because of the drugs, so, you know, she
11 was stocky.

12 She was -- she was a fighter, literally, and
13 she could take the best of a man to the best of a woman.
14 And just as good as she could give it, she could take it.

15 And the reason why I -- I choose to share
16 that was because this particular thing that she worked for,
17 he was 18 years old. He -- he stood about six-foot-six,
18 about 250, I think he was. He was a big lad. And so Tanya
19 was doing his dealings and whatnot.

20 And he apparently had a vehicle and she had
21 access to that vehicle and she was doing his business,
22 whatever, and taking care of his business dealings. And a
23 part of whatever drug choice that she had been using that
24 particular night resulted in her nodding off and, I think,
25 she must have nodded off to the point that instead of just

1 waking back up again, she nodded off enough that she fell
2 asleep for the night and that terrified her. It's like,
3 "Oh, My God, you know, like I got his car," and, you know,
4 she didn't report in, so we can all just -- and we have no
5 other choice. We have to assume what she was thinking
6 because she -- the way I heard it come out. It's like,
7 "Oh, My God, I'm late for work," kind of concept; right?

8 And she called -- she called the idiot and
9 said, "You know, I have -- I have" -- you know, her dealer,
10 "I have -- I have your car. It's good. It's safe. I have
11 your money. I have your product, you know." "Good, no
12 problem, you know. I'm here, you know. Just bring it
13 over." She had no idea. She literally had no idea what
14 she was walking into.

15 So she drove to his residence in the
16 assumption that everything was fine and, apparently, there
17 was a cab there with one of her friends that were meant to
18 take her with her wherever they were going to go back to.
19 And so she went into this apartment building on Windsor
20 Street in Halifax, and she went downstairs, and she knocked
21 on the door as if everything was okay. He knocked on the
22 door -- she knocked on the door and he answered and when
23 the door opened, he struck her with a steel pipe. And I'm
24 quite not sure how much language is allowed to be said,
25 so --

1 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** No filter.

2 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Thank you. He opened
3 the door and he said, "You fucking whore. You dirty
4 fucking rez whore. Where's my" -- and he just started
5 beating her with this pipe, and it was a steel pipe, and my
6 sister took it and she took it and she took it, and she had
7 no idea what was happening. She blocked and she tried to
8 protect and she tried to get away and he just continuously
9 beat her with this pipe. He beat her so bad, Qajaq, that
10 the pipe broke. Don't ask me how that girl made it out of
11 there. Somebody was with her that day, let me tell you,
12 because three months later she -- she might not have -- she
13 might have died that day instead of later when she did.

14 Then she climbed up those stairs and she
15 started crawling out to the floor and, after the pipe was
16 broken, he continued to beat her and kicked her. I still
17 don't understand how she made it out the front door of the
18 apartment building to her so-called friends that were
19 sitting in a cab, who decided to look at her and drive
20 away.

21 So she had to stumble down a road and across
22 the street to some house and, thank God, those people
23 answered the door and didn't just turn her away. They
24 called the ambulance and she died on the way to the
25 hospital. They literally had to resuscitate her twice.

1 She suffered contusions to her arms, to her
2 ribs, to her body, to her face, and especially to her head.
3 I told you she was a fighter. Don't ask me who can handle
4 that and still manage to -- and still manage to have enough
5 strength to actually want to charge him.

6 Thank you. No, it'll mess my makeup. My
7 eyes are bad enough. Thanks for the humour.

8 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** So she charged
9 him?

10 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** He was charged and I
11 believe charged and convicted of what he did.

12 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** What -- what
13 was the charge?

14 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** He was charged with
15 attempted murder --

16 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Okay.

17 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** -- and then pled guilty
18 to aggravated assault.

19 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Got to love our
20 judicial -- justice system, right, which you really don't
21 ever want to get me started on that because it's -- there's
22 a systematic breakdown within there that is so rampant,
23 it's not even funny. They need -- they really need to have
24 that revamped on so many levels and they certainly need to
25 start learning how to have psychiatric assessments done to

1 the inmates, especially inmates that have had trauma that
2 were done to them.

3 So she -- she -- it -- it was convicted and
4 she -- she was --

5 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** She gave a victim impact
6 statement, so that's what you have in front -- a part of
7 that; right?

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yes. Thank you. And
9 so these were her words. (as read)

10 I'm afraid for my life every day
11 to -- due to his friends and just from
12 this assault.

13 Tanya wrote: (as read)

14 I feel hurt emotionally. I'm afraid
15 for anyone to get close to me. My life
16 has changed a great deal to this -- due
17 to this assault. I find that I'm
18 afraid of people getting to know me.
19 I'm afraid for my partner to get hurt
20 from someone who knows it. I'm afraid
21 to work due to getting hurt at work or
22 someone finding me. I have started
23 school to get my mind off the daily
24 thoughts and feelings of getting hurt.

25 And this piece of crap, apparently, from

1 what I understand here, he -- he's angry and he's violent
2 and I think he proved that because he really didn't give a
3 crap about my sister, and he's only 18. At the time, he
4 was 18.

5 According to this, two months later -- this
6 is -- according to this, February 27th now, 2009, he got
7 sentenced to five years and four months in jail with a
8 joint recommendation.

9 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** So joint
10 recommendations, all the lawyers agreed that that was the
11 proper sentence, I guess?

12 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** Yes.

13 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Apparently so.

14 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Okay.

15 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** That's what that would
16 mean in Nova Scotia.

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Thank you.

18 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Two months later, while
19 this thing was in jail, Tanya was killed and from the
20 family's perspective, we had already heard within those
21 timeframes of between the assault, the initial assault, and
22 her going to court for this, that there was a \$2,000 bounty
23 put out on Tanya's head. Geez, I wonder who would have
24 done that? Hmmm. Things that make you go, "Hmmm."

25 So now we're leading up to -- that's

1 February, almost three months, and we're back to when Tanya
2 was murdered. We're back to the dreadful day that our
3 sister, my sister, my mother's daughter, my father's
4 daughter. My -- my nieces -- my niece and my nephews lost
5 the one person that we love in this -- in this family. No
6 matter how dysfunctional we are, we had our own sense of
7 functionality and there was -- it was -- there was a
8 balance. There was a strength.

9 So losing Tanya when she was murdered, a
10 part of what we had to go through in that process was that
11 she was found and the lovely media sometimes doesn't always
12 necessarily pay attention to what they're airing, and I
13 really think they should be, because during the whole time
14 when it's hitting the news, not only just for how I felt
15 and I know it was shared amongst our family, but they were
16 replaying on the replay over and over again was the picture
17 of them finding Tanya and going down and having to bring
18 her up. It's the same picture you get over and over again
19 of her going into the coroner's vehicle, you know, and it's
20 hard. I don't want to see that. I know you have to do
21 your job and I understand that, but, you know, really take
22 another -- pick another picture after you show that initial
23 one, you know, because it does bother us. There -- there
24 is an effect to what we have to see, what we have to -- and
25 I know you have a job to do by reporting, but you're human

1 and you need to look at that. You need to get it out, but
2 you don't need to keep it on a loop that bad and some
3 photos just shouldn't be put on loops like that.

4 So then after we go through that there, it
5 was just chaotic. One of her sons was in jail. And so now
6 we get the call that Tanya was murdered, and I'm trying to
7 remember.

8 So this is happening in Halifax. And I
9 had -- that particular day was -- I'd just taken my
10 daughter to get her needles and I drove back. I was
11 driving by Uniacke Square and I just looked over and I
12 remember it so clear to this day. I looked over. And
13 Uniacke Square in Halifax is just known for a bad area, and
14 it's within a black community, and so I just looked over
15 and I can see all the police and the lights and you knew
16 there was something going on and -- and it wasn't good.
17 Now, for me at this point, we're talking in the daytime. I
18 had no idea at that point that that was my sister, so, "Ah,
19 geez, really? Don't we have enough people hating us?
20 We're sitting here killing amongst ourselves." And I just
21 remember saying, "You know, I feel bad for that family."
22 And -- and then my grandmother had died, so I said, "You
23 know, Mom, send them prayers."

24 I went home and I did my thing and, you
25 know, they were on my mind and just kind of -- but I went

1 about my day and I held my baby a little bit closer and I
2 hugged my other girl -- you know, my other kids and I was
3 grateful, you know.

4 Then I must have found out, but -- by
5 about -- I don't believe it actually -- it may have hit the
6 6:00 news, but I'm not absolutely sure. I want to say that
7 it was almost around ten that I got the call from the
8 family and it was my brother who -- Stanley, who was in
9 jail at the time that called me to tell me that
10 that -- that that family that I was saying prayers for was
11 mine, so we had to turn around and, you know, figure out
12 how to do this.

13 And if there isn't any honest way that I'd
14 ever tell you a recommendation, I'm telling you right now,
15 you'd better figure out who has that template of -- of a
16 toolkit book that exists with Nahanni Fontaine printed
17 because that is one of those things that need to be
18 implemented in this province, in all of these provinces and
19 through this whole great country that we call Canada
20 because you're -- you're so out of there. You have -- it's
21 hard enough when you lose a loved one due to natural
22 causes. We all know how scattered we are. Can you imagine
23 how that feels exponentially, so much higher, and then
24 you've got media and then you've got the wolves coming at
25 you and you've got us trying to digest and figure it out?

1 It's -- it becomes such a huge shitshow, yet we have no
2 idea who's supposed to direct this show and what's supposed
3 to be happening.

4 And, you know -- so, of course, they -- they
5 did the autopsy. I think she had had obviously an autopsy
6 that was done. And so our mother's request was that
7 Tanya -- Tanya come home for a traditional burial, but
8 there were things that had to be navigated prior to that.
9 Like I had to figure out through -- Waterville is -- is
10 youth, right? Okay. So through Waterville, that was the
11 youth correction services that her son was in. I had to
12 start filtering conversations, so we're making calls to all
13 the families and -- and trying to get to the children,
14 especially the children -- her children before this hit the
15 news and we knew it's already out there. It -- just was
16 trying to get it just a little bit ahead of that, right?
17 And I don't -- so it was -- it was hard trying to navigate
18 through all of that.

19 And -- and we know that, you know, the
20 family needs to issue a statement and that's not always
21 easy, especially if somebody doesn't want to issue it. My
22 mother didn't want to do it, so then I got nominated for it
23 and I had to do it because I told you they're not going to
24 stop. It's a human interest story. It's major. It's a
25 major story. Like they're going to want a comment and so

1 if you don't want to say something, just send somebody out
2 there. She said, "I don't want to do it." "Yes, I'll do
3 it." "You do it." I don't want to do it, but I have no
4 other choice because it's -- you know, for us to filter it
5 out the way we wanted it to, it was better if it came from
6 us than something that they could come up with.

7 And then it was really -- you know, just
8 trying to do that and -- and secure everybody home, and the
9 children, and then trying to make the decision whether the
10 kids -- the younger ones should be told or made aware of.
11 Like it -- it was really hard because there's -- there's no
12 protocols. There's no guidelines. There's nothing.
13 You're navigating blindly and trying to figure out how
14 to -- how to figure this out and at least -- geez, at least
15 when I go to Alcohol [sic] Anonymous or somewhere else or
16 even Diabetes Association, they give me a pamphlet.
17 There's no pamphlet that exists for this. There's nothing
18 that says, you know, what is normal, what isn't normal,
19 what is expected, what isn't -- is not expected, you know,
20 so it took us, I believe, a few days.

21 Was it not that we -- it was a few days
22 longer than normal to receive her body because of
23 the -- okay, the autopsy and so we're not united. You
24 know, things are happening at my mother's house and -- and
25 then I'm up at my house and, you know, we're -- we're

1 communicating and my brother's with my -- you know, my
2 brother was there with our mother and still there was just
3 a lot, you know, of trying to figure out and then still
4 trying to figure out what to do best for Tanya; right? And
5 so during all of this, just -- that's just us trying to
6 figure out our family parts of things, you know.

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** That's not
8 even looking at the investigation yet. That's just how to
9 deal with that news together or alone. Yeah.

10 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Even collectively, it's
11 still -- there's just -- there's so many fundamentals that
12 you just don't understand. There's so many things. Like
13 why does it take so long? Well, of course, I didn't know.
14 It was because, you know, we didn't know the autopsy.
15 You -- you know with natural causes that it's always a
16 possibility for an autopsy, but you -- you know, we don't
17 know, you know, brackets [sic] "Autopsy, two days, okay,"
18 you know, so that we know it's two days for a natural
19 cause; two/three days it could be for a murder. You know,
20 who -- who knows? We didn't, so -- and you're wondering
21 why, you know. God forbid, don't even start on trying to
22 identify the body and then that -- that part of it comes
23 into play and that -- that in itself is just -- and you
24 can't even imagine. Until you walk it, and until you live
25 it, and until you experience it, you can't even imagine.

1 And so we -- we're here and -- and, you know, and we're
2 going through this and all the while this is what's going
3 on right here.

4 Over here and out there, geez, oh, good
5 Lord, let's say, hey, there was a witness. Did you know
6 that? There was a witness that went on -- on camera, and I
7 love this. You know why I love it -- I really don't love
8 it, but do you want to know why I love this? Because they
9 showed his name, but they blocked out his face. And you
10 know what the gist of what he said? He said, "Yeah, I -- I
11 seen -- or I heard about this that happened, you know,"
12 and -- and there was probably something more and I haven't
13 ever seen the -- the interview again. I watched it enough
14 on replay at home, but the gist of it was he had told the
15 reporter that he was in his third floor apartment building
16 that overlooks where my sister was walking that night
17 towards that school, and this is just off -- coming off of
18 the Halifax -- she was just -- the night before she had
19 left the Halifax Regional. That was her last known place
20 that she was seen was at the police station.

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** At the police
22 station?

23 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** At the police station.
24 So you can understand that we're learning things at the
25 same time we're dealing with the murder, so this is her

1 murder. This is -- this is here. This is at home and then
2 this is transpiring of, you know, kind of figuring out
3 what's going on, and I'm giving it to you the best way that
4 I can recollect with you from my memories, but at the same
5 time I have -- I have to rely on what was already coming
6 out.

7 So -- and then, of course, it was hitting
8 the media outlets, right, and one of them was this
9 individual. And I can't -- I can't tell you the name
10 because I can't remember it, and he stood there and hid.
11 He had said that he was in his third floor apartment and he
12 watched. He watched this woman walking hastily and looking
13 back, so she's walking not because she's taking a casual
14 stroll. She walking and you know enough to know that
15 she -- she's feeling unsafe because she constantly kept
16 looking back and trying to pick up her speed. And that he
17 said he seen five individuals followed behind her.

18 You know what that man did? Mind you, he's
19 on the third floor, Qajaq, in his apartment, which is
20 behind a locked door in a security building and he's
21 watching this. He decides that he's going to pick up the
22 phone and call his sister in Ontario and says, "Hey, I need
23 to get out of here. I'm afraid for my life." Fucking
24 kidding me. "Seriously, you called up your sister -- your
25 sister to have a conversation when my sister is walking and

1 you know she's not looking safe?" And we're less than
2 what, guys, two blocks, is it, to the Halifax -- two blocks
3 to the Halifax Regional? "Less than two blocks to the
4 Halifax Regional Department, less than a half a block to
5 the community -- Halifax sub-office within that area, and
6 you are calling and saying you're not safe? How the hell
7 do you think she felt?"

8 And I -- I live with the fact that I'll
9 never know that that man -- that man could have saved my
10 sister's life. That ten, 15-minute phone call that he had
11 with his sister could have been the thing that could have
12 saved my -- well, it wouldn't have ended as a statistic,
13 and I will never know. And I can't even tell you whether
14 he decided to get out of that building and go to Ontario,
15 and I really don't care. And I -- I try to find it in my
16 heart to have -- to have forgiveness for him, but I'm just
17 not there. I'm just not there. Maybe some day, but that
18 day isn't today.

19 So now at the same time as this is issuing
20 out in the media and we're dealing with that, we're trying
21 to secure the body. Of course, the police department are
22 doing whatever it is that they're doing, so then, you know,
23 they finally confirm that it was a homicide and so now we
24 have to deal with the funeral aspect of things. And now
25 we're starting to get into the -- the judicial, you know,

1 the -- the police part, you know, what the police play into
2 it, and that's the part, unfortunately, I think is going to
3 be more directed for these guys because of -- as I've said
4 before, murder doesn't exactly unite families.

5 There's quite a lot of division in our
6 family and because of that, there's some things that I'm
7 not privy to knowing of what was going on. I did do what
8 I -- I needed to do for my mom and I helped her make the
9 arrangements that were necessary.

10 You know, I -- I was -- I was there when we
11 had to claim Tanya's body and -- and then we had to try to
12 start what we thought was going to be -- you know, us to be
13 able to -- to start to heal by laying her to rest.
14 Unfortunately, that didn't really happen.

15 We went through our -- our, you know,
16 traditional burial that we do and she had a 24-hour wake
17 and we stayed constant and she was -- the body was never
18 left alone because my mother -- that was one of the biggest
19 requests my mother wanted, was that she was not to be left
20 alone. She was alone when she died. She did not want her
21 alone for a moment afterwards and so somebody was always
22 with the body. And so at the end of it, Tanya was
23 cremated. We had the services for her and she was cremated
24 and then we -- I believe -- I don't know, so I'll have
25 to -- at what point did we realize that Tanya -- we didn't

1 have all of her, which -- when was it? Did mom know?

2 **MS. DOREEN BERNARD:** Yeah, I think the
3 police called.

4 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** I think what she's --

5 **MS. DOREEN BERNARD:** Yes --

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Do you want to
7 just introduce --

8 **MS. DOREEN BERNARD:** -- my name is Doreen
9 Bernard and I've been working with the family of Tanya for
10 many years. I've known Connie, the mom, for -- since 1961
11 as residential school survivors together and later on in
12 years. She called me to -- for support and finding out
13 through the police that -- that her brain was being kept
14 for evidence and so this -- this is the reason why there
15 wasn't any closure for the family because there wasn't a
16 burial. And I worked with her through the years to -- to
17 try to help her to resolve that so that she could get the
18 rest of Tanya's body to be buried.

19 We talked about, you know, a service, doing
20 a traditional service so that the children would have a
21 place to go to honour their mom, you know, on Mother's Day
22 especially and Christmas and holidays and birthdays, just
23 to have a place to go and for the rest of the family to
24 honour their sister, you know.

25 And she was adamant that she was going to

1 bury her without [sic] the rest of her. She felt that it
2 was really important in our traditions that we're whole,
3 you know, when we -- when we are buried, so I supported her
4 through that process for five years. She called the police
5 and coroner. She called almost daily for -- for the first
6 few years and then she kept -- she kept at it.

7 And we -- we did memorial walks in the city
8 and in Millbrook to memorialize and to -- to remember
9 Tanya, to keep her spirit alive in -- in the minds of the
10 public in hopes that she would get an answer -- get answers
11 from -- from the public to solve her murder. And she
12 didn't want her to be just a statistic, you know, just
13 a -- she kept saying that we need to keep -- keep -- need
14 to keep doing this until we find justice and we supported
15 her on that in Halifax and in Millbrook as well.

16 And right till the day she passed away, we
17 were working with CBC News to -- I was actually on my way
18 to tell her that CBC News wanted to speak to her about the
19 missing and murdered special that they were doing in
20 Toronto and that was the day that I found her, when she had
21 passed away. And I was hoping to give her good news that
22 this was going to be national and not just Nova Scotia
23 news. This was going to be national, across Canada, and
24 that it was time for her to tell her story, yeah. Thank
25 you.

1 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Anything you
2 want to add?

3 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** I'm Catherine Martin.
4 I'm a member of Millbrook and I've known Connie all my
5 life. The first time I met Connie, Tanya's mom, was when
6 my grandfather forced me to go up to the top of the church
7 where the choir was singing because Connie played the piano
8 for the choir and he made me go up and sing with them all.
9 And I just remember Connie being so lively and I don't know
10 who taught her piano because there wasn't a lot of piano
11 players, but she played with all her heart in her whole
12 body, so I really loved -- I loved that part. I guess it
13 was Christmas choir.

14 So -- and -- and, of course, she was good
15 friends with my mom and dad. My dad was an alcohol and
16 drug counsellor for all of my life and they were very
17 close, my dad and Connie, so I just knew their family and,
18 well, you know, just that way.

19 And when Tanya -- I -- I do a lot. I sing
20 and help families whenever there's a death in the family
21 and I -- I guess I -- well, I end up being in situations
22 where it's very -- a very difficult thing, like with Nora
23 Bernard's death and with Tanya's death, when it's a -- you
24 know, when -- when there needs to be a lot of healing. So
25 I often sing at funerals and so that's how I get brought in

1 usually before everything else begins, to -- to work with
2 the family on what they want and how they'd like that and
3 what they'd like us to do, so -- and it's an honour always.
4 And Connie brought me in. And I knew Chelsey, Tanya's
5 oldest daughter, and Tanya's son because I think they were
6 both in -- in Cambridge when I knew them and worked with
7 her kids on video -- making videos, so I knew Chelsey and
8 so she was very broken.

9 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** She is very broken.

10 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** She is. She's a
11 tough girl.

12 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** But broken.

13 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** So -- so just -- I'm
14 just trying to remember this.

15 So we did have the funeral and, of course,
16 it's a new thing lately in the last few years that
17 cremation is a way of our people because it's always been
18 the other way and so that's a little bit of stress on
19 family. The older people want the body and the younger
20 people, you know, are okay with this, so -- so
21 that -- that's stress. You know, I think there needs to be
22 some help amongst our -- within our own communities just to
23 come together on this piece. It would help when you're
24 trying to work things out.

25 So it's a tradition and a belief that the

1 whole body needs to be buried in internment, that all parts
2 need to come together; that's -- that's part of our -- some
3 of our -- some of us have that belief and the older people
4 believe that, so Connie didn't want Tanya to be buried
5 until her brain was returned, and she knew that. She knew
6 that this was for investigation, but she asked that Tanya's
7 remains stay until -- until the day that those -- her other
8 parts were -- were returned and that if she died before
9 that happened, that she was not to be buried until Tanya's
10 remains were all together.

11 And she also was adamant in every walk. We
12 had -- you know, it was always a discussion, "Do we have
13 the memorial in Millbrook walk or do we walk in Halifax
14 where she was?" so we often had two just to deal with
15 things. And I remember that, you know, her -- it was very
16 important, I think, when Tanya would have been 40 years
17 old. We had a very special walk where I was -- you know,
18 when -- when Connie asked you to do something, similar to
19 her other -- her daughter, you just do it. And she's very
20 direct about it, so we had -- she asked me to get 40
21 balloons, yeah, so I got the 40 balloons. And we had a
22 beautiful walk where there was -- you know, people talked
23 about it and I had students that time in Millbrook, so I
24 gave them the -- they were all filmmakers for the day and
25 they interviewed Vanessa, and talked with Connie, and we

1 recorded every which way, but loose.

2 And those walks, our communities have been
3 walking sometimes just three women, five women, seldom with
4 the support of our band councils, seldom with the support
5 of men walking with us and oftentimes, you know, "Why are
6 you bothering? What are you doing? Why are doing this
7 walk?"

8 And I remember for many years, there was
9 only us walking to raise the awareness. And when the
10 Sisters of Spirit campaign came about with Native Women of
11 Canada, Connie was just all over that, you know, because we
12 got t-shirts now to walk and then we got to make the paper
13 dolls and so Native Women of Canada and Nova Scotia and,
14 you know, across the country helped give those families
15 hope because that was a day that we could do and honour
16 these women and try to get people to raise the awareness,
17 so Connie was all over that, so -- so those were her
18 wishes.

19 And every time she spoke -- and I'm sure the
20 media has lots of clips of her over the years -- she would
21 often say, "I don't want it just to be about Tanya and
22 women. I want boys and men to be part of this awareness
23 campaign, that we have lost men and -- and boys, but not
24 just to be part of the campaign, but the boys and men need
25 help," and Connie -- that -- that was her message at every

1 gathering.

2 So before -- so over the -- the six years
3 while she was alive and in the seventh year she had died
4 just before the -- the next walk, Connie had asked me to
5 come into -- she had been offered some help by private
6 investigators and so her friend, a good friend in Truro,
7 and myself were asked to come to work with the private
8 investigators and we had a couple meetings and Connie
9 directed me. She said, "Don't let me down, Catherine.
10 Don't mess around with me and make sure you're -- you know,
11 if -- if they call you, you'd better tell me what they're
12 saying," because I was her contact in case they couldn't
13 get hold of her. A lot of times they couldn't, so they
14 said, "If we find anything out, who should we call?" and
15 she said, "Cathy, but don't you mess around."

16 So, anyway, I love Connie and I loved -- I
17 love women who have no fear to speak out and -- even though
18 their lives and their family's lives are threatened when
19 they speak out. And I love when there's no fear and she
20 had no fear. And Vanessa is getting there. Yeah, she's
21 realizing that if someone has to step forward -- and I know
22 Connie would say, "When we step forward, we need the people
23 behind us. They have to have our back. So if we step
24 forward and everybody's agreed, 'Okay, we're going to move
25 forward with this,' and you turn around and all those

1 people said, 'Oh, yeah, we're right there,' and they're
2 gone, it's -- it puts people in a place," so I don't know
3 how that would become a recommendation. It's more of
4 a -- a message from Connie to all the women and the men.

5 So the investigation was -- the private
6 investigator used to be a police officer with the Halifax
7 Police and he was working really hard. He had three or
8 four of his team working on this investigation and she was
9 so hopeful, yeah, because she felt that she had
10 not -- that -- that the investigation with the police had
11 just sort of died out. Even though she was calling them
12 all the time, she just felt it wasn't getting anywhere and
13 so she accepted the help and that was very difficult for
14 her to accept and trust help from anybody. So it was that
15 year that she began working with the investigators and then
16 she -- she died.

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Is that
18 investigation ongoing?

19 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** With the private
20 investigators? We've talked.

21 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Privately or --

22 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** The private
23 investigators.

24 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Oh, I'd like
25 to hear about both investigations.

1 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** Yeah.

2 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** The Halifax Regional
3 Police file would be still open.

4 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Yeah, okay.

5 **MS. JENNIFER COX:** The private
6 investigating --

7 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Is a private
8 matter, so. Vanessa, do you want to speak?

9 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah, so one-half what
10 you're asking. So I think the one-half that you're asking
11 is as far as the Halifax Regional, yes, that one's still
12 going and are you still working on it or --

13 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** I haven't since she
14 died. I mean we've had one meeting and we haven't.

15 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** So, no, privately then
16 it's not -- it's not going.

17 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** Well, I think it is.

18 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Okay. We think it is.
19 And I think that's one of the biggest
20 conversations -- thank you, Cathy -- with bringing all of
21 this.

22 And -- and just some of the things that she
23 touched on in the senses of -- of our men because,
24 unfortunately, our men are a huge contributor at times to
25 domestic violence towards our women and so we need to find

1 ways to support them and have -- in a way that they know
2 how to support us females and us women in our -- and us
3 girls in a more healthy conducive manner.

4 And I -- and I know the majority of the
5 support system behind me is recognized as female, but I
6 have to recognize my male part here and that's my male
7 support, Robert. He is -- he's my family. You know,
8 he's -- he's not blood, but he's -- he's a part of -- we're
9 family now and, you know, we've -- we've travelled down
10 several paths and we've had -- you know, we know each
11 other's stories and having him behind me to support me, I
12 think, sends a strong message and one that I want everyone
13 out there to know, that we rely on that. I rely on that to
14 know he's got my back and I know that if I needed it and
15 these -- these fine ladies weren't here, I know he does.
16 There's not one doubt and one question that I know that
17 he -- he's there and that he understands because not too
18 many -- I can't say that I -- I completely understand his
19 story because his sister, his beautiful sister, is still
20 missing.

21 We have a commonality but they're still
22 separate, yet they're still equally -- equally important,
23 so I can support him the best way I can in senses of our
24 differences and we celebrate those differences, do we not?
25 We don't see them as divisions. We celebrate them

1 and -- and we find that strength from within each other.

2 And Robert and I had been together, along
3 with Agnes -- which I don't see her, but she was
4 around -- with his sister, Agnes. We've had our time
5 together at WATT and WATT is Wiping Away the Tears and I
6 will touch on that before we end, but I -- I had to give
7 him that recognition because it goes in correlation to what
8 Cathy was saying, that we need to have that.

9 I'm not threatened by him. He doesn't
10 intimate me. He encourages me and supports me in -- in
11 that healthy manner. If I needed to snout on his shoulder,
12 I know I could do that and there's not going to be any
13 judgment to it, and that is what we all need. All of us
14 women need that and should have that in -- in our male
15 counterparts. And we need to learn how to teach that at a
16 younger age so that they don't turn out that they can't
17 support us and they're the result of the domestic violence.

18 I know being here -- being here and doing
19 this, I am already at risk. This just makes it a higher
20 risk that's on my back for my safety and I'm prepared at
21 the end of the day that if that's going to happen to me,
22 it's going to happen to me and I can't change that, but if
23 I sit here and I be silent about that, then -- then I'm no
24 better off than anybody else that wants to play ignorance
25 to this.

1 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Do you mind if we
2 discuss the brain --

3 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah. So now with that
4 being said, you know, one of the most essential parts and
5 accomplishments for us today, Qajaq, was, as you can
6 see -- and I'm going to share it with you because I like
7 you, so don't mess it up because if you do I can find you.
8 It's very easy.

9 So you are honoured -- you have the
10 privilege and the honour right now of being wrapped in the
11 same blanket that was -- that had my sister's brain. How
12 does that make you feel? I told you I'd get real.

13 **MS. DOREEN BERNARD:** The brain was in a box.

14 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** I was getting there. I
15 had to let her stir for a minute.

16 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** You got her
17 back.

18 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** It took a fight after
19 my mother that I decided randomly to pick up. And actually
20 just before I touch on that, I was going to go into that,
21 and I'm going to let you stir while you're holding onto
22 that because Tanya -- this is -- Tanya's wrapped around
23 you.

24 And I have to give the recognition to -- to
25 my awesome support person here, Helen Renier (ph) through

1 Victim Services. And I'm going to be honest enough,
2 people, I did not like her. We did not get along and this
3 partnership did not really exist. Don't ask me -- ask why
4 she stood by me and stuck it through, but she took my
5 abuse, which was polite.

6 But during the (indiscernible) in Halifax,
7 Helen walks up to me, and I don't think a lot of families
8 are mindful of what I'm about to say. And so Helen walks
9 up to me very respectful and polite and she's like, you
10 know, "Hi. I'm Helen. I'm from Victim Services," and I
11 looked at her and said, "M'hm, yeah," and she said, "You
12 know, just I wanted to give you my card." I said, "Don't
13 you think you're fucking seven years too late?" and she
14 just went, "Yeah, but here's my card and if you need me,
15 I'm available." And the reason why I said that to her is
16 that I don't know if the message is out there enough and
17 I -- and I will have to speak with Robert about that, if he
18 even had had any of that, but with Victim Services in my
19 mind, and that's just in mine, that the instinctive part of
20 me said, "There's services? That means the victim's
21 family." Yes, I know I'm Tanya's family. It's just for me
22 the instinctive thing was my mom, my dad, her kids. You
23 know, that's -- I would think that that would be our
24 natural reaction, to think that that's where those services
25 would instinctively go to naturally. And I mean we're

1 still looking and we're still learning how -- how to -- to
2 translate that.

3 This wonderful lady can't walk up to, you
4 know, just random people on the street and say, "Hey, I'm
5 Victim Services. Are you suffering a trauma from anybody
6 that was murdered or hurt or injured?" She -- she can't do
7 that. And at the same time, she -- she's limited to a
8 certain amount of things that she can -- what she can
9 approach within the family and for me.

10 I didn't believe that I was entitled to her
11 services. I thought they were only limited to, like I said,
12 my mother, my father and her kids that was immediate to her.
13 Even though she is my sister, I just didn't realize that
14 Victim Services extended itself to collectively the whole
15 family and -- and I think that is essential.

16 The only way you are going to utilize those
17 services and those programs is if you step up and you speak
18 up and you ask for it because they cannot knock on your
19 door. They cannot come to you and ask you if you need it.
20 That's something you need -- you have to -- we have to as
21 families -- our whole MMIWG family needs to -- to let all of
22 our loved ones that are experiencing, have been exposed and
23 are still enduring, that if you need resources on the
24 ground, tangible, really in-your-face resources immediately,
25 then you need to start looking into your local Victim

1 Services because I think that's the only way that they're
2 going to be able to integrate themselves within our family,
3 and that's a bridge again that we need to gap.

4 We need to close that bridge so that
5 those -- that organization realizes just how fundamentally
6 important and essential they are to our healing, to -- to
7 the start of our healing. Through or whatever we need
8 moment, they -- they are here just as you are here, so I
9 need to know that whatever services that you think that I've
10 already said that I know you hear, I don't need them
11 floating up there waiting for federal funding budgets.

12 I need you to make sure that some way, some
13 how, we need tangible on-the-ground resources now. And I
14 don't need them just because you're here. I need them long
15 after you're here. And so whatever federal and provincial
16 and legislative, political ballgame, whoever wants to play,
17 they need to get off their asses and start figuring -- stop
18 thinking in a linear sense and start opening your minds and
19 find a way how we can close this gap and become a unity.
20 It's like my infinity symbol. We know there's a beginning,
21 but there should never be an end no matter who -- who
22 gets -- pass through in the political crap -- and I'm not a
23 politician by any means and I never want to be, so they know
24 what they're doing, but I'm telling you that some part of
25 that always needs to have a constant flow.

1 We already know what happened. Let's try to
2 make sure it doesn't continue to happen in the future -- in
3 our future children, in our children, in our sons, in our
4 daughters, in our women and our mothers and our
5 grandmothers. In our -- in this great day -- age and in
6 this country, Canadians, they need to wake the hell up and
7 realize it's not all about the colour of my skin. I'm a
8 person. I'm a life and all of these missing, murdered
9 Indigenous women and girls, that is what exactly they are
10 and they matter and one -- one too many is one too many.
11 That is my rant.

12 Now this. It took me seven months because
13 of that relationship -- and the reason why I said that and
14 that's why I went with that was because I -- I didn't
15 realize her services.

16 So when I started on the journey of bringing
17 Tanya's brain home, it was a random 2:00 in the afternoon
18 thought on September of last year. I was like, "I'm done.
19 I want her home and I need to figure out how this is going
20 to happen and somebody knows something and somebody knows
21 how to do something." I may not know how to do it, but
22 somebody's going to know how to get me where I need to be,
23 to a table, so I can get into your face and tell you it's
24 been seven years and that's seven years too long that we've
25 had to wait to lay Tanya to rest, seven years, Qajaq. My

1 sister, up until my mother's house fire, and that would
2 have been the last two years, both my mother and my sister
3 has been sitting on the funeral shelf because it's too
4 emotional to keep them in the home, so they've sat in a
5 funeral parlour waiting to be laid to rest and that to me
6 just got to a point I'm done. It's not -- the idea of
7 knowing that it's sitting there, no.

8 So I started that journey in September and I
9 made some phone calls. Don't ask me even who it started
10 with, but somebody I started with and I started screaming
11 on them. And then they relocated me to some lawyer in
12 Ottawa, and then sent me off to somebody else, and I think
13 by the time I got passed around -- and I got passed around
14 Ontario pretty fast. At the third one, I'm done. "If you
15 even think about transferring me again, I'm going to call
16 back and I'm really going to scream because somebody needs
17 to know who I need to talk to," and that last person says,
18 "Well, I'll give you the number to Victim Services in
19 Dartmouth -- in Halifax." "Oh, God damn it, not Victim
20 Services. I don't need them." Little did I realize I did
21 need them.

22 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** And you had her
23 business card?

24 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** And I had her
25 business card. The funny part was is that I really didn't

1 have her business card. I was so pissed off at her, I just
2 tossed the card. Ironically --

3 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** Fair enough.

4 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** -- karma came back
5 around and guess who I got sent to? M'hm, she was --

6 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Indiscernible)

7 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Everything happens for
8 a reason. So she -- she was -- I was meant to throw her
9 card away -- no offence by the way -- and -- and she was
10 meant to -- to be where she is today. And with the
11 strength of her and the belief that she gives me, we
12 started on the journey to -- and with all of her help, I
13 was able to work and correlate how to navigate through
14 the -- the interdepartment [sic] areas that I wouldn't have
15 access to as a family member, so she was the one that could
16 bring team leaders -- team players, the key team players,
17 to the table.

18 So we managed to set a meeting and we
19 brought the medical examiner. We had the medical examiner.
20 We had Victim Services. We had the homicide. We --

21 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Prosecutor?

22 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** No, nope, no. No, it
23 wasn't -- not -- not the -- the chief. It was the chief of
24 police, Dr. Bowes' office. I think that was
25 collectively -- right, and the -- and the detectives, so

1 the -- the majority of the team players. There was another
2 individual that was brought to the table, but for legal
3 purposes we can't explain who that individual was.
4 Nonetheless, that particular individual also is a major key
5 player to the table.

6 And I think if anybody knows me, they get a
7 sense of my mouth. Thank you. And so here I am and I -- I
8 don't have MD and I'm not a lawyer and I don't got PhDs and
9 I got no other extra initials at the end of my name, and so
10 here I'm sitting at this -- this table at the Medical
11 Examiner's Office and, you know, the boardroom table and so
12 we all sit down and, Qajaq, I literally had no filter.

13 I sat down and I -- I cut to the chase and
14 that's the gist of what I did with you today. We just cut
15 the filters out and there is none, and that was exactly
16 what I applied to all of these major key players. I had
17 said to them that, "If you're going to sit here and waste
18 my time and us not have an honest and open dialogue and not
19 figure out how we can achieve this, you might as well just
20 tell me now. Don't waste my time because I want -- I want
21 action. I don't need bullshit." So out of the eight, nine
22 of us that are at this table and we're all highly
23 intelligent, if we cannot come up conclusively with
24 something, there's something wrong. And we can't look at
25 it just because this is sitting here like this. We all had

1 to collectively take ourselves out of the centre and emerge
2 it from a different perspective and it took a lot of work,
3 months of us meeting and re-meeting and -- to do what we
4 had to do because at the central part of all of this, we
5 did not want the integrity of that investigation to be
6 compromised for anything and even to this day, had that
7 been a factor or a possibility, Tanya still wouldn't have
8 been laid to rest.

9 I honestly didn't anticipate coming to this
10 Inquiry with that, being able to say that she is laid to
11 rest. I was expecting to be coming here to tell you I'm
12 still fighting to bring my sister's brain home, but I won
13 that fight. All -- thank you. All of the -- the people
14 needed to hear what I had to say really stepped up and they
15 listened and they listened enough that we got -- we got
16 stuff moving. It's not the word I wanted to use, but we
17 got stuff moving and -- and everybody worked enough
18 together to -- as a team, and that is the key word. It was
19 done with respect. It was done with dignity, and it was
20 done with support, and we worked as a team.

21 In this whole shitshow of -- of a mess that
22 our -- our family is going through, that was the one thing
23 that we acted as and because of that relationship at that
24 table, we were able to open the dialogue and have -- and
25 start to establish a relationship with the Halifax Regional

1 and that was a little bit different than
2 what -- unfortunately, what my mother wasn't able to do.

3 And I -- I tried to encourage the officers
4 and one of them that was just on Tanya's case got promoted,
5 and I had called it at the time of the meeting that I knew
6 he was going to. I said, "You're here for now, but at some
7 point you're going to be up for a promotion and you're
8 going to be gone, and then what? Then here we go again.
9 We're starting all over." So that detective had laughed at
10 the time and Detective Withrow (ph) is still with us and he
11 was present when Tanya was found and he's still on board.

12 And I really -- I don't hold back, you know.
13 And one of the biggest things that I found that is hard is
14 that with the police is that if you're picking up my
15 sister's file and you're taking a look at it or a glance at
16 it, why -- how hard is it for you to pick up that phone and
17 touch base with me? It's not that difficult. If I -- I'll
18 give you my phone number. So if you have an itch and you
19 thought of me that day and, you know what? Oh, My God,
20 I -- I would want you to pick up your phone and just touch
21 base, say, "Hey," because that's what makes us human; that
22 I know you have a job to do, but at the same time you have
23 to realize that we're sitting here going, "Who, what?" We
24 know -- it's almost like the five Ws, the who, what, where,
25 when and why, but some of them we don't have the answers

1 to.

2 So with respect to that, we had finally got
3 the phone call just before her anniversary, literally, and
4 Helen -- Helen called me and I got that -- that phone call
5 because you could understand they had to do what they had
6 to do. And Dr. Bowes, amazing medical examiner. Mind you,
7 I really did not like him either at the beginning of this
8 and he knew it because he had what I wanted and I wanted it
9 back and you needed to tell me why you have it and why I
10 don't and my mother didn't, so our relationship got off to
11 a pretty rocky start until I think he pretty much figured
12 out I wasn't backing down and to the point that he went
13 above and beyond.

14 He made sure that in order for us to secure
15 that brain and to bring her -- that part of her home,
16 he -- he went to a fellow colleague, which is top -- okay,
17 well, Dr. Bowes is top in his field. So he got a second
18 recommendation and they redid another autopsy so that there
19 was absolutely undoubtfully [sic] no way that the would
20 have, could have possibilities that if they choose to
21 give -- and that was it -- if they choose to have given
22 that back to us, that it was not going to compromise this
23 case, and I wouldn't have wanted it if that was it.

24 So after he got the second independent
25 done -- autopsy, you know, and made sure everything

1 was -- the i's were dotted and that the t's were crossed,
2 he -- I finally got that phone call. She got the phone
3 call, so Helen from Victim Services, she got it and she was
4 the one that called and -- and told me the news and it
5 was -- it was better than winning the lottery. It was
6 seriously so much better than winning the lottery. "I have
7 to call you back," and I literally hung up on her because I
8 just literally had balled so hard that I finally achieved
9 this, that I achieved what my mother couldn't achieve, you
10 know, or couldn't and it's not that she couldn't. It's
11 just -- it was a different struggle and it was a different
12 fight, you know. And so to get that phone call was -- it
13 was everything and we -- so we grabbed -- we had set
14 arrangements to have a meeting for the -- for the exchange.

15 And they were -- they were phenomenal
16 and -- and I'm fortunate because I know a lot of my -- the
17 missing -- the MMIWG families aren't as fortunate, and I
18 recognize that, and we were -- we were fortunate that this
19 team that we had pulled together for that moment was
20 awesome. Like they really -- they really stepped up and
21 they really, really put above and beyond what they needed to
22 to make sure that that had happened.

23 And so we met and Cathy here had brought the
24 blanket, our sacred -- it's the red blanket. And she was
25 with us to do a -- a cleansing for Tanya and, Qajaq,

1 everyone was present, every individual of those main figures
2 that were at that table that we had powwowed to have in an
3 honest dialogue came together and they stood by and they
4 participated in that sacred ceremony to honour my sister.

5 And Dr. Bowes went above and beyond and made
6 sure that whatever evidential things that he had had, he
7 brought in and he made sure that she was cleansed. And he
8 assured me that whatever was left behind that had to be was
9 wrapped in red cloth and that is so -- I was speechless
10 because he's honoured her and he respected her. The last
11 little part that he had had, he respected her and so, no, we
12 just didn't get a piece of the brain. It was in a box, not
13 that I had seen what it was in. The way he presented to me,
14 I left it intact the way he had done, and she wasn't alone
15 from that point on until we had to take her to the
16 cremation, but she was -- she was wrapped right from the
17 time -- ceremonial. From the time I received her back from
18 the Medical Examiner's Office, she was wrapped in this
19 blanket and this blanket is -- is the significance of a
20 fight that I've been fighting and a fight that I'm not going
21 to stop fighting. And so we -- we had to take her to the
22 crematorium and she went in this and -- and even then I was
23 afraid, "Oh, My God, like do I have to pay for this too?"
24 Like I had no idea. And Dr. Bowes was, "Don't you worry
25 about nothing. You -- and if there's any cost,"

1 which -- "No, it's not even open for discussion. Don't you
2 worry. I'll take care of that," and he did, and that -- and
3 the reason -- that is the type of relationship that needs to
4 exist. It shouldn't be, "Oh, maybe we should think about
5 it." It shouldn't even be a thought. It should be so
6 instinctive to want to do that, not because it's just your
7 job, but because that is who you should be. You should want
8 to be as a damn human being for whatever these families are
9 going through. Those -- those actions -- and that is the
10 key word -- those actions will speak louder than any words
11 you can possibly think to speak and that to me is what he
12 did. That to me is what earned the respect.

13 And the detectives being there and the chief
14 of police being there and him knowing exactly where I stand
15 and him knowing that I am watching. "If you think that I
16 ain't going to put my foot up, unh-unh-unh. I will if I
17 feel that you are going to fail my sister's investigation, I
18 am going to be the person to sit there and tell you you're
19 failing and if you can't do the damn job, step aside, find
20 somebody else that can."

21 So throughout this, I'm not going to tell you
22 that there's a recommendation, Qajaq. I'm not going to.
23 There are probably some recommendations and I think you've
24 gathered them and only one thing that I'm going to -- I want
25 to give you food for thought for, and we had touched on

1 this, is that in today's society that we live in, we already
2 have infrastructures implemented and if I'm thinking about
3 this, I want everybody else to start thinking about this.
4 What happens when a person's missing? He knows. I don't
5 know. How long does it take? What are those procedures
6 into missing? And I'm sure everybody has watched TV. Come
7 on, we all know what "48 Hours" is. It's on A&E and
8 anything that I see when I watch that, it says everything
9 that is essential and crucial says it's the first 24, 48, 72
10 hours. It can make, break -- make or break a case.

11 And so I'm sitting here and I'm thinking and
12 I'm thinking what would be one of the most predominant
13 recommendations that I want you -- you to -- to know and I
14 mean you're going to know certain ones outside as well that
15 have been submitted, but not -- but on this -- in this
16 platform, I'm -- I'm just thinking.

17 It's like an Amber Alert. I -- I don't know.
18 Does anybody else know what entails in an Amber Alert?
19 Well, we know an Amber Alert says it's -- it's a child
20 missing. Okay, what determines -- what are those criteria
21 that determine a child missing? I don't know. Do you know?
22 No, so you don't know; right? And -- and that's it, that's
23 the honest answer. You said you don't know, not right now.
24 It doesn't mean that you're not -- but you don't know and
25 that is what I'm trying to say is that if you don't know and

1 I don't know, okay, so now we know we need to know.

2 But I think about an Amber Alert in the sense
3 is that you're going down the highway, whether it's in Nova
4 Scotia, New Brunswick, PEI, Quebec, Montreal, Toronto, all
5 the way across this country. If they're flashing caution
6 signs and they have the ability to -- to put up a picture of
7 a -- of a missing child on an Amber Alert, I just want to
8 know is why is it that we can't already utilize something
9 that's already out there, maybe have to tweak it, but
10 what -- tweak it a little bit. Why can't we use something
11 that's -- that's already out there for our missing and for
12 our murdered?

13 What if the guys -- the person or whoever it
14 was that murdered my sister did it and decided to skip town?
15 Had that face -- had her face, had her information, had the
16 crime actually been presented in a larger platform on a
17 larger scale that could have reached a
18 bigger -- this -- this shouldn't just be nationally. This
19 should damn well be going internationally. This should be
20 going global. I want to know that if you decided to take
21 off to Thailand or Budapest that this story and any -- one
22 of these stories that you've heard here over the last three
23 days is going to make it that far because we have no
24 idea -- we have no idea where they could end up, none, not a
25 clue, but at least we know that if that -- if an alert like

1 that is issued out in that -- that type of platform, oh, My
2 God, if you're driving, I bet you if -- if you did see an
3 Amber Alert on the highway, you're having the conversation.
4 You're having the conversation within yourself, within your
5 family; you're circulating it that way. So if you're having
6 that conversation just because it's an Amber Alert, why can
7 we not have that conversation because it's one of our
8 missing or our murdered women?

9 I'm not asking you to come up with the
10 millions to implement that right now, am I? No, because
11 it's already out there, so why can't we take something like
12 that that we already have and utilize it because in those
13 24, 48 and 72 hours, they can -- we know what they can do.
14 So that to me, if we know that it's already out there in the
15 context of an Amber Alert, why can't we change the way we're
16 thinking and stop thinking it so linear and start -- open
17 our minds to various ways to make changes that are already
18 within our means that are -- that are tangible, you know, so
19 that -- look into children's services, health services.

20 Oh, My God, our health services is horrible,
21 so horrible that my sister's son that was 23 committed
22 suicide and he was a youth child -- a youth support worker.
23 He got it right. He got adopted out. He got adopted into
24 his foster family. Last year, he -- he killed himself, and
25 how many more of our youth or our children are going to feel

1 like that?

2 So I'm going to share with you -- if you
3 need -- I may need a minute here -- one last thing and it's
4 the only thing I can give you from her son who right now,
5 he's just not where he needs to be to be strong enough to
6 have a conversation with you; however, I want to take his
7 words and let you hear his words and then we'll --

8 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** I'm going to go. My
9 phone.

10 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yeah. Then I want to
11 share so that you --

12 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** You didn't say the
13 precedent setting.

14 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Cathy, she wants to
15 go.

16 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** One second. She has
17 something to add.

18 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** I just wanted to
19 mention for the return of the remains by the Commission, it
20 was precedent setting in the country and he wanted -- I
21 think there was one other case going on and they were
22 waiting for that -- that to be resolved so it became
23 precedent setting, so that -- you know, that might be
24 something to look at.

25 And then we did have the funeral to bury

1 both Tanya and Connie and she had -- she worked really hard
2 to bring her brother out of the penitentiary to -- to come
3 with us and the guards were -- you know, it was a difficult
4 time to bring them together and the guards were really
5 having a hard time between their -- the law of how they
6 could allow that person to attend and be with us and the
7 way the Mi'kmaq welcomed him, so that we just wanted to
8 remember all the work everybody did for that and there you
9 go.

10 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** So, yeah, and I mean
11 that is a huge thing because from what I understand, even
12 with -- and I know it's because it's an ongoing
13 investigation as far as the brain went in Tanya's case, but
14 I'm hearing that that's the norm. I'm hearing that they
15 can withhold this. And any one of their body parts or
16 their possessions that are on them, they have the right to
17 withhold that from us. That's wrong and -- and it
18 shouldn't be considered as a social norm and socially
19 acceptable for that to be okay with because I'm not okay
20 with it and if I'm not okay with it, I'm certainly sure
21 there's a lot of other families that are out there feeling
22 the same thing or not being aware that that -- that it's
23 not and don't -- don't accept the answer as being yes. No,
24 you can. Yeah, you can and I'm proof of it. Yeah, you
25 can.

1 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** It shouldn't
2 be the default setting.

3 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** No, exactly. I
4 couldn't have said it better.

5 So this one was sent to me from -- from her
6 son, Qualin, which is essentially is her baby and I
7 had -- I had asked him. I said -- I told him I loved him.
8 I said, "Hey, son," I said, "mom" -- I said -- he says,
9 "Hey, mom." I said, "I love you and I'm proud of the young
10 man that you are and you're becoming," and he said,
11 "Thanks." And I said, "Can I ask you for a favour?" I've
12 got to butter him up, right? He says, "Sure, mom." I
13 said, "You know I'm presenting today on behalf of your mom
14 and," I said, "I can really use your words and your
15 strength, but I want to know how has this affected you,"
16 and this is what he said. (as read)

17 It impacted my life a lot more than
18 what people realize. I never
19 understood death until I got older.
20 I've been fighting myself and my
21 family. I fight because when she
22 passed away I was angry. I hated
23 everyone for letting her move to
24 Halifax and letting her go down the
25 road she did, but at my age now I see

1 that we couldn't do anything to change
2 her. I see that people tried to help
3 her, but she didn't listen. That's
4 what I'm feeling.

5 I see that people are trying to help me, but
6 I don't want help. I just want to deal with my problems
7 myself. That's kind of how it's changed me. It made me
8 appreciate my family more than ever, but it also made me a
9 very angry person.

10 Qajaq, he's 16, so, yeah, mental health
11 services, they shouldn't be negotiable.

12 It's good to see you guys get an extension
13 on this because if you didn't, it would have been a huge
14 failure to the rest of us because you guys needed that
15 extension in order for you guys to be able -- and I'm only
16 getting the gist of what was issued, so I needed you to
17 know that I recognize that you guys needed that time, but
18 use that time wisely. I gave you that shirt. Don't fail
19 it. You have to be real. You have to be honest. Yes, you
20 have a title to wear and it's a heavy crown, but you're a
21 woman. You're strong and we need you to be strong because
22 when we're weak, we need to know that there's others out
23 there that are going to stand up and they're not going to
24 cower and they're not going to be afraid.

25 And if you don't know a question, want to

1 know the answer, go out of your way to figure it out.
2 Don't fall into a norm. When you guys are sitting down and
3 you're coming up with a collaboration of -- of what is and
4 what isn't, look at it not just from one angle. You have
5 to come in from all different angles, the good side, the
6 bad side.

7 You've been in this one. You've emerged in
8 this one. You've got the information. Now, it's up to you
9 how you choose to run with it and it is a huge, huge burden
10 you're going to carry, but you imagine that that's the
11 burden we carry every day and we don't get to just type a
12 letter and excuse it away. We're stuck with it and if I'm
13 stuck with it, I want you stuck with it as a Canadian, as a
14 Canadian woman, to know that I matter, his sister matters,
15 she matters, and everybody that's been here that has
16 watched matter.

17 And if there's a death or a murder in your
18 community, I would hope to God you're up there and out
19 there with the rest of the search parties, not because
20 you're their family, but because you're a person and that
21 is what we need everybody around here to start waking up.
22 It's not a burden for you to get up and give ten, 20
23 minutes or an hour of your time to help somebody else's
24 family go through something that you really do not want to
25 have to go through because, let me tell you, I would give

1 anything not to be sitting in this seat today and I do not
2 ever want -- or if I can help to stop any other family from
3 living this and experiencing this, I'd do it. I'd do it in
4 an instant, so don't you think that I'm stopping for a
5 moment because I'm not and I hope you're not either.

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I'm not.

7 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** I'm proud of you.

8 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I'm proud of
9 you.

10 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** You engaged. You
11 listened and that's what this Inquiry is supposed to be
12 about at #nofilter. Thank you.

13 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** We're
14 finishing with a song being played. And last night I was
15 drawn to a beautiful little baby.

16 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** She's here.

17 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** And her mom
18 let me hold her.

19 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** (Indiscernible)
20 and -- and then my granddaughter.

21 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Exactly. I
22 learned that she was your granddaughter and you asked to
23 play a song --

24 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** M'hm.

25 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** And it's a

1 song written and performed by Twin Flames, artists, one of
2 whom is Inuk from Northern Quebec and I've -- I've met
3 them. I know the song and I knew the words, so you and I
4 listened to the song and sang together to your --

5 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** My granddaughter.

6 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** -- your
7 granddaughter, so I think we're --

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Here she is. Here's
9 your gift.

10 **COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** We're
11 finishing with "Porch Light" by Twin Flames.

12 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Yes, and thank you.
13 Thank you for -- thank you for being present. And while
14 you're sitting there doing the same thing, you get to hold
15 the strength that I told you she has and I want everybody
16 to realize that this -- this beautiful granddaughter of
17 mine, she's just starting her life and we as Canadians and
18 whatever race, nationality, Cree, decree, whatever you are,
19 whoever you are, you all have accountabilities to our
20 families. You have an accountability to her and that's
21 what we have to make sure everybody wakes up and starts to
22 realize. This just isn't an Indian problem or a Native
23 problem or an Indigenous problem. This is our problem as a
24 country. So if you've failed us in the past, we can't
25 change that, but this little girl is the future, so let us

1 not fail her.

2 (MUSICAL PRESENTATION)

3 MS. JENNIFER COX: Mr. Registrar, if we
4 could adjourn or conclude this matter?

5 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: You just
6 wanted to explain the song?

7 MS. VANESSA BROOKS: Well, yeah, the
8 song -- as you can see right there on the screen, it's
9 dedicated to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and
10 Girls that have lost their families and that's the
11 inspiration for the song and so it just seemed that it -- I
12 just felt that it was fitting to introduce
13 today's -- today's truth -- today's conversation with you
14 with a song of my sister that you -- you can understand by
15 feeling.

16 And I brought her into this and I -- I
17 thought it'd only be fair to -- to honour my MMIWG family
18 because that is what I have, that -- that is what we are a
19 part of now, and that is a tie that is not going to be
20 taken away or broken. We didn't ask for it. It was just a
21 gift that was given to us.

22 And so, as you notice, I have like really
23 beautiful nails and I know you've asked me about them and
24 the reason why I did them this way is it's the sacred
25 colour red, but I painted the middle one, the ring

1 finger -- not the middle one -- sorry -- my ring -- I
2 thought about that, sorry. I got the two confused. My
3 ring finger's one is for -- well, they're sacred because
4 they're my ring fingers, but the significance is they're
5 yellow and that's the hope for our families and it's the
6 hope for this Inquiry, #nofilterdon'tscrewitup. Thank you.

7 (SHORT PAUSE)

8 **MS. VANESSA BROOKS:** Hello, hi. I'm just
9 checking to make sure it was on.

10 So we had touched on this book and -- and I
11 told you my sister was a very artistic woman and so there's
12 two things that I want to share with you and this is
13 something that she wrote. She wrote: (as read)

14 Just like me
15 Sometimes I think life is really bad
16 I think of the things that I could have
17 had
18 Material things mean nothing to me
19 They're good to have, but I'm still
20 lonely
21 True love is what I'm searching for
22 And there you are behind the door
23 Open it and you will see
24 You're looking for love just like me
25 She's so good. And it's the only little bit

1 of writing that I actually honestly have left of my sister,
2 so, as you can -- as you can see in the front, that's
3 her -- her actual penmanship, which -- when my mother's
4 house went on fire, we don't have a lot of those personal
5 touches left of her, so.

6 And Tanya had a little caption that was a
7 part of this and here it goes. She said: (as read)

8 Here's a prayer that may help you
9 through any hard times you have if you
10 just believe.
11 With love and respect,
12 Tanya Brooks
13 Indian Prayer - Tanya Brooks:
14 Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in
15 the winds, hear me
16 For I am young, small and weak
17 I need your strength and wisdom
18 I see -- I seek strength, Oh, Great One
19 Not to be superior to my brothers and
20 sisters
21 But to conquer my greatest enemy,
22 myself
23 I seek wisdom, the lessons you have
24 hidden in every leaf and rock, so that
25 I may learn and carry this message of

1 life and hope to my people
2 May my hands respect the many beautiful
3 things you have made
4 May my ears be sharp to hear your voice
5 and may I always walk in your beauty
6 And let my eyes forever behold the red
7 and the purple sunsets so when my life
8 fades like the setting sun, my spirit
9 will come to you
10 Without shame, I have spoken all my
11 relations

12 **MR. ROBERT PICTOU:** Hi, everyone. My name
13 is Robert Pictou. I come out here for the camera so I'll
14 make it a little easier, not that I'm afearing (ph)
15 cameras.

16 I just want to mention something really
17 quick. The song that you heard was "Torch Light" done by
18 Twin Flames. That song was inspired because a similar
19 activity. You heard the word "WATT." That was explained
20 and that was the Wiping Away the Tear ceremony that
21 happened two years ago and that's where we met.

22 I testified earlier and showed a beaded
23 piece that I did of my sister and that's when I met the two
24 individuals who wrote that song. And when I told him what
25 I was doing and -- and I handed him a picture of my sister

1 and I told him that she was missing, he was dumbfounded and
2 that inspired the song which later became "Porch Light."
3 So it's amazing. The right time, the right moment can make
4 a difference.

5 **MS. CATHERINE MARTIN:** We always end our
6 ceremonies, our four-day ceremonies, with the lighting or
7 to bring -- to close the ancestral fire and then, of
8 course, the feast. So the feast is in the tent, yeah,
9 and -- yes? So it's in the big white tent. You're
10 wondering why that was set up for four days. And the
11 closing of the ancestral fire will happen just before the
12 feast.

13 **Exhibits (code: POP04P0301)**

14 **Exhibit 1:** Digital folder of images displayed on
15 monitors during public hearing

16 --- Upon recessing at 5:42 p.m.

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

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



Jane Baniulis

February 8, 2018