

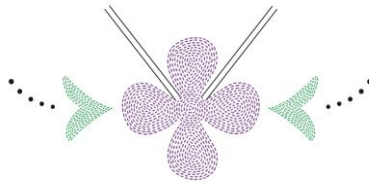
National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale
sur les femmes et les filles
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-gathering process – Part I Public Hearings
Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel
Elmbridge Room**

Metro Vancouver, British Columbia



Public

Thursday April 5, 2018

Public Volume 93:

Dorothy Pootlass, In relation to Mary Joseph

**Heard by Commissioner Brian Eyolfson
Commission Counsel: Thomas Barnett**

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APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations	Non-Appearance
Government of British Columbia	Leah Greathead (Legal Counsel)
Government of Canada	Lucy Bell (Legal Counsel)
Heiltsuk First Nation	Non-Appearance
Northwest Indigenous Council Society	Non-Appearance
Our Place - Ray Cam Co-operative Centre	Non-Appearance
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada	Non-Appearance
Vancouver Sex Workers' Rights Collective	Non-Appearance
Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak / Women of the Métis Nation	Non-Appearance

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Registrar: Bryan Zandberg	

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LIST OF EXHIBITS

NO.

DESCRIPTION

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Witness: Dorothy Pootlass

(No exhibits entered)

1 Metro Vancouver, British Columbia

2 --- Upon commencing on Thursday, April 5, 2018 at 16:22

3 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Okay. So we're just
4 waiting for the Registrar to come.

5 And we are here right now to hear from the
6 story of Dorothy, Dorothy Pootlass.

7 Before we get started, we've got a number of
8 family members that are here for support and we're just
9 going to introduce everybody. So I'm just going to pass
10 the mic around and if each one of you could introduce
11 yourselves.

12 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** Okay. I'm Dorothy
13 Pootlass and my mother's maiden name was Joseph.

14 **MR. ARCHIE POOTLASS:** Yeah. My name is
15 Archie Pootlass. I am my with wife Dorothy here to
16 support.

17 **MR. LESLEY NELSON:** Yeah, my name is Lesley
18 Nelson, Gusgimukw which is Quatsino, with my cousin
19 Dorothy.

20 **MR. GEORGE NELSON:** Hello. My name is
21 George Nelson from Gusgimukw, Quatsino, and my brother Les
22 and I come here to support Dorothy, my cousin, when I heard
23 that she's coming here to just tell her story. I just came
24 to Vancouver just yesterday, so I didn't know this was
25 happening but I knew you guys were looking into the --

1 inquiring about the murdered and missing ladies, I guess.

2 Yeah. Thank you.

3 **MS. DENISE POOTLASS-WILSON:** Hi. I'm Denise
4 Pootlass-Wilson. I'm the daughter of Dorothy. I'm here to
5 support my mom.

6 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Thank you all for being
7 here.

8 Registrar, I understand that Dorothy would
9 like to affirm on the eagle feather and she has her own
10 eagle feather here -- sorry, promise on the eagle feather.
11 Thank you.

12 **REGISTRAR BRYAN ZANDBERG:** Good afternoon,
13 Dorothy. Dorothy, do you promise to tell your truth in a
14 good way this afternoon?

15 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** I do.

16 **REGISTRAR BRYAN ZANDBERG:** Thank you very
17 much.

18 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** So Dorothy, we are here
19 to listen to you. With that, where does this story begin
20 for you?

21 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** My story starts when
22 I was seven months old. My mother went to see my
23 grandmother in Alert Bay because her mom was having a baby
24 and it was a 50/50 chance for the baby or the mom to die.
25 So my mom went to go and see her mother.

1 As it turned out, my Auntie Barbara died and
2 they had a funeral for her. And my mom stayed around for a
3 few more days and got caught in the wrong crowd. And the
4 people that she was with were drinking and the man didn't
5 want my mom to leave. People in the village could hear her
6 screaming for help.

7 And they were out on the waves outside Alert
8 Bay and there was a fisherman and they were out on a boat
9 and there was no way that she could get back into the shore
10 because the boat was out on the waves.

11 So the man pulled her really hard and she
12 was trying to get off the boat. And she was going to go
13 into the water and go back to the shore because she wanted
14 to go home to see her mom. And he pulled her really hard
15 and hit her head on the deck of the boat on the hatch. I
16 think he thought that she was dead so he threw her
17 overboard. And then she was found on a log, holding onto a
18 log on a boomstick.

19 And I heard so many different stories about
20 my mom, how she was supposed to have died, but I know that
21 when people are partying they talk about things and I don't
22 think my mom died accidentally. I think she was hurt
23 before she hit the water.

24 And like, too many times our people, when
25 they get harmed by somebody, they just get thrown under the

1 carpet like we don't matter.

2 So in one week, not even eight days, we had
3 a funeral for both my mom and my aunt.

4 My mom went to residential school and I was
5 told by someone just recently that my whole family, my
6 uncles and my aunts, including my mom, were raped and
7 violated by their father because of the residential school.
8 So I'm guessing that's why my mom was having problems in
9 her life.

10 She spent most of her time with my
11 grandfather and they lived -- he lived in Quatsino.

12 And I did a lot of crying when I was a kid
13 and I never could understand why I cried so easy.

14 And a lady came to me. She came and she
15 said to me, she said that, "Probably the reason why you cry
16 so much is because you were such a small child when your
17 mom left you."

18 And it's had a really horrible impact on my
19 life. I can't even imagine what my mom was like. I don't
20 know anything about her except for the picture I have of
21 her.

22 And I cried a lot and I didn't know why I
23 was so hurt when I was growing up. And this lady helped me
24 with my spiritual healing and she reconnected me with that
25 baby. And then I said, "Maybe it was because my mom got up

1 and walked away and never came back."

2 And I feel so robbed. I feel like I lost
3 out on so much because I never had a mom. And I think that
4 the residential school has done so much damage to our
5 families and it took so much away from me.

6 I didn't know that my mom died until I was
7 16. I couldn't figure out why I looked so different from
8 the parents that raised me because I didn't even look like
9 my dad and I don't look like my mom. They just don't
10 resemble me at all.

11 And then somebody, one of my uncles came and
12 told me that my mom was murdered when I was a baby and it
13 just really affected my life. After I found out my mom was
14 murdered I really fell off the deep end and I started to
15 drink.

16 And when I was a kid I was so badly abused
17 in my home physically and verbally and sexually. And
18 sometimes I wonder what it would have been like if my mom
19 was still alive. I went through so many traumatic things
20 when I was growing up. This is so unfair.

21 I know in my gut that my mom was murdered.
22 I know she was. My mom wanted to come home to me. I know
23 she did but she didn't have a choice.

24 That residential school damaged our people.
25 I know that if my mom was still alive today things would

1 have been so much different for me.

2 I know that the residential school is trying
3 to help us and they're trying to do things for us, but it's
4 failing our people. It tries to give us some counselling
5 and stuff but that's not enough. They're limited to what
6 they can do to help us and we need help.

7 Our villages are really struggling because
8 of this. So many of our women are being abused and treated
9 so badly and my mom was one of them. And I just feel that
10 the justice system just doesn't work for us. They don't
11 help us at all.

12 And I tried to talk to people about my mom
13 and nobody wants to talk to me. That makes it so hard for
14 me because I don't know her. I don't know what colour she
15 liked. I don't know what kind of food she liked to eat.
16 All they say to me was, "She was a really nice woman."

17 I said, "But that doesn't tell me anything."

18 I'm so thankful that my grandfather helped
19 me to stay in the family because my grandfather fought for
20 me. My grandfather just really fought for me when it came
21 to my mom because him and my mom were so close.

22 And I don't know what they called them in
23 those days but they tried to come and take me and they
24 said, "Your mom's no longer around. You're an orphan."

25 And they tried to take me from my

1 grandfather, my great-grandfather, but he said, "No, I'm
2 not letting her go."

3 And I'm so happy that he did that for me
4 because it made my life -- I don't think I would have
5 survived in the White world. I wouldn't have survived. So
6 many of our kids commit suicide from being in the Social
7 Services care, but my grandfather fought for me and he kept
8 me in my family. And I'm so thankful for him and my great-
9 aunt and my uncle.

10 But it's just not the same without my mom.
11 I wonder sometimes how I would be if my mother was alive.
12 I feel for people that lose their parents. But it's just
13 not the same when you're a baby and your mom leaves and
14 never comes back. And I feel like there's just not enough
15 out there to help us to get better from this.

16 Even though I was having a really hard life
17 I tried to make the best for my family because I thought
18 that's what my mom would have did for me if she was here.

19 I always tell people to love your mom, love
20 your mother because I will never know what it feels like to
21 love a mom. She's just a picture to me, just a yearning in
22 my heart that I wish I could have met my mother. It's so
23 unfair.

24 I turned my life around to try to help my
25 family so my family could have a better life. And my

1 mother that raised me went to residential school and she
2 used to get really violently brutal with me because she
3 said she doesn't want me to die too.

4 And I told her, I said, "You've just made me
5 so afraid of death."

6 And she tried so hard to take care of us but
7 she just didn't know how because nobody in the school knew
8 how to be parents to their kids and they took them away.
9 And they totally, permanently, took my mom away from me.
10 You hear all these people getting their kids taken away but
11 I got my mom -- my mom went away and never came home.

12 I was even telling my aunt, I said, "I wish
13 my mom would just walk through that door so I could go hug
14 her and give her a kiss and tell her how much I love her,
15 but I never can do that."

16 It really traumatized me. It traumatized me
17 so badly. It affected me in a really bad way. I just wish
18 that there could be a better way, like, to heal from this.

19 I just want to thank my family for being
20 here. I want to thank my husband for helping me through
21 this stuff that I've had to go through in my life. No
22 matter what I've put him through, he's always been there
23 for me.

24 I thank my parents who tried so hard to be
25 there for me, but they just didn't know how to parent me.

1 But I'm really hurting. I was so afraid to
2 come in here. I feel like I just walked into the morgue.
3 It would be like I'm in the morgue and I'm with my mom and
4 I can't even tell her how much I love her.

5 I wish there was a way that we could just
6 get rid of the pain. Every day I want to just give my mom
7 a hug. It's so sad when people lose their parents. My mom
8 was so beautiful in the picture I saw of her, so beautiful.

9 I think we need better policing forces and
10 stuff to take care of our people. My mom shouldn't have
11 died that night. We need better policing services for our
12 communities. Our people are hurting and killing each other
13 off slowly with alcohol. And I don't want to see any more
14 people die.

15 And I know that the residential school
16 people just only give us so much. And I tried to ask if I
17 could go get some help from a place called Landmark and --
18 because I just want to step out of that dark place that I'm
19 at and move into a really good place.

20 I needed to do this today because I have to
21 let my mom go.

22 Our people are in such denial. I think the
23 only reason why my mom was into the alcohol was because of
24 the residential school, what the residential school people
25 did to us. It's still impacting all our kids, all their

1 kids, all our grandkids and our grandchildren.

2 It's not enough what we're doing. The
3 government is just not doing enough to help us. Every day,
4 every single day, our kids are still getting taken away,
5 our people are still going missing, people are still
6 getting murdered. And it's just not okay any more.

7 My heart is just bleeding from the inside.
8 I just don't know how to get past this. I just want to get
9 past this pain. I've heard of people losing their babies
10 but I've never heard of a child losing their mother.

11 We would like a break.

12 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Commissioner, at the
13 request of Dorothy, if we could just take a quick break,
14 five minutes perhaps?

15 **COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON:** Sure, let's
16 take a five-minute break.

17 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Thank you.

18 **COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON:** Thank you.

19

20 --- Upon recessing at 16:44

21 --- Upon resuming at 16:48

22

23 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Thank you for that
24 break, Commissioner. If we could resume.

25 Dorothy, if it's okay with you I just have a

1 few questions. Could you tell us about the community where
2 you grew up?

3 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** Well, my great-
4 grandfather George, he kept myself and my Great-Aunt
5 Margaret and the man that she married -- his name was
6 Andrew -- and also my Uncle Tom-Tom. We called him Tom-Tom
7 because that's what he wanted to be called.

8 And we lived in a place called Quatsino. It
9 was not where the new place is right now. It's an old
10 village that we used to live in. And I spent a lot of time
11 there with my grandfather. I just really loved him so much
12 because of what he did for me. And he used to do carving
13 and painting and stuff.

14 And he even built me a little playhouse.
15 It's not a little playhouse, it was actually a large
16 playhouse. It was even bigger than the smokehouse and it
17 was big enough for a bed and a little stove and a table and
18 chairs. And he even built me some cupboards. And he
19 taught me how to make rice on that little stove.

20 And I spent a lot of time with him in the
21 village because I just really wanted to be close to him.
22 And I would go -- if I wanted to go to the store, there was
23 a store called Kinsey's and it was maybe about a mile and a
24 half away on the water.

25 And my grandfather was very big. He was

1 really tall. He was 6'1" or something and he had these big
2 arms and big hands on him, but gentle as could be. And he
3 would get me on the rowboat and he would just -- it seemed
4 like he only took like, two swings of the oars and we'd be
5 there because he was just so strong. But he was such an
6 awesome, gentle person.

7 And we lived in a house that was full of
8 holes, but really cozy home. And the floors had knots, you
9 know, like, knots that were popped through.

10 And I spent a lot of time there because I
11 just loved to be with him because he had me sleeping
12 upstairs and he would sleep downstairs by his carving shed.
13 And every morning he would have coffee brewing and that's
14 what would wake me up, like, five o'clock in the morning.
15 And he'd be singing. So I just really loved to be with
16 him.

17 He taught me how to speak the language
18 because he couldn't speak English. I would just pick up
19 objects for him and show it to him and he would nod or
20 shake his head. And that's how I learned how to speak the
21 language.

22 I treasure that in my heart because that's
23 how I broke the wall between him and I. He couldn't speak
24 English and I couldn't speak the language. And he was able
25 to teach me the language through immersion. I guess it was

1 immersion.

2 But he was very big and had the biggest,
3 huge hands, but he was very gentle and very kind to me.

4 And I remember our grandmother teaching me
5 how to make bread on rocks, make a little Dutch oven kind
6 of thing and then we'd make bread on the rocks.

7 And a lot of the kids in the community were
8 mostly boys and the boys used to tease me a lot. And when
9 they were teasing me, I was not afraid of snakes so I would
10 find the nearest snake pit and I'd find the snakes and I
11 would go chase after them and put the snakes down their
12 neck. I would put the snakes down their neck and the boys
13 never bothered me after that.

14 And then we played -- I was a real tomboy.
15 We played marbles and I would go there with a small little
16 bag of marbles and the boys were like, "I got all these
17 steelies," and you know, the really big gigantic marbles.
18 And they said, "We're going to whip you."

19 And I said, "Okay. We'll see about that."

20 And I'd get down on the ground. They'd make
21 the circle and we'd play marbles. And I'd walk away with a
22 great big bag of marbles and the boys had no marbles left.
23 And they're looking at me and they're like, "How did you
24 learn how to play marbles?"

25 I said, "I grew up with my Grandpa. He

1 taught me."

2 But those are some of the things that we
3 did. And we'd play hide and seek at night because we
4 didn't have lights there so it was really hard to find
5 people in the dark. But we played kick the can and it was
6 a really nice little reserve.

7 And they had a hydro plant that used a
8 generator so we had to turn the lights out at a certain
9 time. But it was a nice place and everybody knew each
10 other and we all got along really well. Yeah, it was a
11 beautiful little place.

12 But when I wasn't with my grandfather I was
13 in a place called Port Alice and it's a mill town. And my
14 dad that raised me worked in the mill and my mom was just a
15 -- what do they call them today -- she stayed home and took
16 care of the kids.

17 But the mill town, I had a lot of friends
18 there. To tell you the honest truth, I didn't know that I
19 was a First Nations person until I was in Grade 10 and
20 someone finally asked me where did I come from?

21 I said, "I have no idea. I'll go home and
22 ask my mom."

23 And I asked my mom and then she -- at the
24 time, we used to be called Indians. And she says, "You're
25 an Indian."

1 I said, "Oh, okay, whatever that is."

2 And I went back to school and told them and
3 they said, "Yeah, if you're an Indian why don't you prove
4 it?"

5 So I said, "Okay. What do you want me to
6 do?"

7 And they said, "Sing something in your
8 language."

9 So I went home and got a book that had our
10 language in there for religious songs and I sang "Amazing
11 Grace" to them in our language.

12 And they said, "You're right. You are an
13 Indian."

14 But yeah, it was, you know, I never felt
15 racism in my entire life, in spite of that, you know, being
16 a First Nations person living in a multicultural community.
17 I had no problems with racism even though -- I don't know.
18 I don't know, most people ask me for my status card. They
19 don't believe that I'm First Nations but I tell them,
20 "Yeah, I am. I'm First Nations." I'm not ashamed of it.

21 And yeah, it was nice growing up in a small
22 town. Knew everybody. Yeah.

23 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** You had mentioned that
24 you found out what happened to your mom when you were 16.
25 What did you believe or know about your mom before that?

1 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** I actually didn't
2 know anything about my mom before that. I think I would
3 have been fine if I didn't know. It was a shock. It was a
4 real shock to my system. And I really fell off the deep
5 end. And I even became suicidal, just really got in a
6 really bad place. I just wanted to drink my life away
7 because the pain, the deep pain that I had, I felt like
8 somebody took a bat and whapped me in the face with it.

9 I was like, I wondered why the people that
10 were raising me didn't look anything like me or I didn't
11 look like them. But I'm really thankful for them in spite
12 of the things that my mom that raised me went through in
13 the residential school and she put me through. She put me
14 through a lot of that stuff too.

15 And I think I was like, seven years old and
16 -- or six years old and she locked me in a room and left me
17 in there for seven days all by myself. And I was like,
18 where are all the adults in here, you know? Like, there's
19 nobody here. I'm the only person in this room. And she
20 took the lightbulb out of the socket and left me a potty, a
21 roll of toilet paper, and a bag of bread and a bottle of
22 water.

23 But like I told you, I'm a real smart -- you
24 know, I was a really smart kid. She padlocked the door
25 from the outside but she just completely forgot that the

1 window opened. So when she would -- when it would be
2 nighttime I would climb out the window and I would go see
3 my uncle who lived across the street and I'd ask him for
4 some food.

5 And he says, "Where's your mom? Where's
6 your parents?"

7 And I said, "I have no idea. They're
8 nowhere. I don't know where they are."

9 "Well, that's just crazy," he said. He was
10 really upset.

11 And then -- but I would be so fearful and I
12 would just climb back in the window and sleep in the dark.

13 And to this day, I can't eat bread and I
14 can't drink water and I can't be in the dark. That was the
15 worst thing that ever happened to me when I was a kid. I
16 just wanted to go back to my grandpa because I knew that
17 was -- if my grandpa had me, he wouldn't be doing things to
18 me.

19 And I used to think, you know, like, I think
20 that if my mom was alive I wouldn't be going through those
21 things. I thought about that after.

22 But it's not my mom's fault. She went
23 through a lot of abuse when she was in that residential
24 school. I know she did. She was brutalized in there so
25 she did it to me too. And if I was five minutes late from

1 going out when I was a teenager, she would really beat me.

2 Finally, when I turned 17, I sat her down
3 and I said, "I want to know why you never let me socialize
4 with anybody, you never let me go anywhere, to dances or
5 anything, and whenever I was late, you'd always give me a
6 licking and I didn't deserve it."

7 And she said, "I was trying to protect you.
8 I didn't want you to die."

9 And I said, "Why?"

10 She said, "Because your mom went out one
11 night and she never came back because I didn't protect
12 her."

13 I said, "There's got to be a nicer way to
14 protect people than that."

15 I've been so imprisoned all my life because
16 of that situation I was in when I was a kid. I used to
17 (indiscernible) all the time. I don't go anywhere. I stay
18 inside a closed house right now because I feel like that's
19 what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm so fearful all the
20 time.

21 I feel it's really come into my life. Like,
22 I was always afraid when my husband was driving on the
23 highway. I used to say, "Don't drive too fast. I don't
24 want to die." And I was always worried about dying.

25 But my husband's really been supportive of

1 me. In the last little while, he's really changed that and
2 I'm so thankful for that.

3 He taught me -- I remember laying on the
4 couch trying to learn how to read books because I just had
5 a passion for reading and my mom told me that I wasn't
6 allowed to read books because it's going to make me lazy.
7 So I never read books after that. And then I had a lot of
8 support from my friends when I was in high school. They
9 were trying to help me to learn how to do things but I just
10 couldn't get it.

11 And then my husband, when we got married, I
12 felt like he was my knight in shining armour. I felt like
13 that Cinderella story. I was doing everything for my mom
14 but I felt like no matter what I did, it wasn't good
15 enough. And then when he came and he asked me to marry
16 him, I was like, "Oh, yes, I want to get married. Let's
17 just get the heck out of this place." I wanted so badly to
18 get out.

19 And he knew that I was having a hard time
20 learning because I only had a Grade 6 level of reading when
21 I first met him. And he was so kind and helped me to learn
22 how to read. And before he knew it, I was reading like at
23 a university level.

24 And I decided later on in my life, after my
25 children were all in school, I decided to go back to school

1 and turned myself around and got my university degree. And
2 you know, that's something I would have loved to have
3 shared with my mom, walking across that place. It would
4 have been so nice to see my mom waiting for me to
5 congratulate me. And she probably would have been so proud
6 of me. I always make sure to tell my family members I'm so
7 proud of them.

8 The place I grew up was pretty awesome. I
9 had a lot of friends there, lots of supportive people. But
10 a lot of people were going through similar things that I
11 was going through. And I'm still in connection with them
12 today. We're really still good friends, yeah. And I love
13 that, keeping them close to my heart. Yeah.

14 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** You've mentioned
15 several times in your story about in your community and in
16 your family, people have experienced hardship and abuse and
17 how that's influenced their behaviour. Do you have any
18 recommendations on how to stop that?

19 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** There needs to be
20 more awareness from the RCMP. I believe that we need to
21 have our own policing and our people trained because our
22 people know how our people are. And our people need to
23 have somebody that's going to really be understanding of
24 where we're at, meet us where we're at. The policing force
25 needs to be put back in place in the communities.

1 foster parents -- our foster people in this whole province,
2 65 to 70 percent of the kids are from First Nations people
3 and they're still taking us away from our parents. And I'm
4 advocating for the kids right now and I'm helping them to
5 go back to their own homes, and that's where they should
6 be. They need to stop taking our children away, because
7 this is where the damage began. We need to stop this.
8 It's just so heart-wrenching to see.

9 I had a cousin that came home from being
10 fostered out. She was fostered out to Alberta. When she
11 came back she was so messed up, she went right to the skid
12 row down here and some guy that she met was drinking with
13 her and threw her out the Balmoral Hotel room, out the
14 window, and killed her.

15 Like, why do all our people have to die?
16 It's just wrong. We need to stop this. We need to start
17 putting things into place to help our people. Our people
18 need help and there's just not enough help given to our
19 people to help them with what's going on. The violence in
20 our communities, the sexual assaults that go on, the verbal
21 abuse, the physical abuse, it's just running rampant
22 through all our villages.

23 What I said earlier about my mom getting
24 raped by her own father, that is just totally unbelievable.
25 Like, my own stepdad didn't even touch me when I was a kid.

1 How could my grandfather do that to his own kids? But it's
2 because of what he was taught in the residential school.

3 That residential school intergenerational
4 curse on our people needs to be lifted and the government
5 needs to wake up and do something about it. Put more time
6 and more energy into putting a stop to what's happening to
7 our people. Our people should not be dying like this.

8 The next thing that's happening with our
9 people is the alcoholism, the drug overdoses. Look at all
10 the people dying down in the streets down here. People are
11 just giving up on their lives and it's because so freely
12 the government gives -- I told one of my family members, I
13 said, "The government gives us a Welfare cheque in one hand
14 and it goes right back to the government in another hand to
15 the liquor store."

16 That is just wrong. If my mother wasn't
17 drinking that night, she would still be here today.

18 That alcohol needs to be taken out of our --
19 and more resources need to be brought in. They need to
20 train more people in our villages to get the funding they
21 need to have our own people on the reserve to help our
22 people. We can't continually do this. It's got to stop.

23 I am so tired of going to funerals. I am
24 tired of going to funerals. Every other month one of our
25 family or friends is dying because of this alcohol and drug

1 abuse that's going on. It's wrong. The government needs
2 to wake up. They do. Enough is enough.

3 I'm hurting big time because I lost my
4 mother, and I'm so thankful that I'm healthy. I don't have
5 an alcohol or drug problem, I don't smoke. I will not give
6 the government any satisfaction to have me die because he
7 wants me to drink the alcohol he produces. I will not go
8 there.

9 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Just a few more
10 questions. Do you know if anyone was ever arrested or
11 charged in connection with the death of your mother?

12 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** All I was told when I
13 inquired about this was that there was an inquest and what
14 they told me was that she died an accidental death. But I
15 don't believe that. I strongly do not believe that. My
16 mother was murdered. I really do strongly believe that she
17 was murdered because people talk. When people are drinking
18 they talk about things and I know those people that were
19 with her that night are talking about it. And it's not
20 right.

21 There was an inquiry and I would like --
22 inquest or whatever they called it then, and I'd like to
23 find out what's on that. I would like to find out that
24 information.

25 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Do you have any idea

1 what year that happened?

2 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** It was in 1952.

3 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** And do you know if
4 there was ever any police investigation?

5 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** I don't know the
6 information on that, but I even tried to call the office in
7 Alert Bay to see if they knew any information about that or
8 if they had some kind of archives or something put away
9 that they could let me know what happened, because I know
10 when police are involved they usually have to go to the
11 scene where the crime happened or whatever. I know they
12 have to do that. I'm pretty sure police were involved.

13 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Do you have any other
14 recommendations or is there anything else you'd like to
15 share with the Inquiry?

16 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** Well, the other thing
17 that I think that needs to happen is that the RCMP, I know
18 that the RCMP are pretty violent with people. And I know
19 for a fact that they've done that to people in my family.
20 The RCMP and the policing services is really poorly run.
21 They need to quit abusing their power and start protecting
22 us like they're supposed to be protecting us and helping
23 us. And there are a few amongst millions of them. There's
24 a few of them that I could say that are actually doing
25 that.

1 But there's a lot of violence that goes on
2 with the police force and our people, and it's not right.
3 It's wrong. And that needs to stop. Our people are --
4 I've heard incidents where the police have put women in the
5 cells and the cells have cameras in there and they're
6 watching these women when they're going to the bathroom and
7 stuff like that. And that's privacy problems. You can't
8 go into somebody's house and sit in the bathroom and watch
9 someone go to the washroom. That's privacy issues.

10 And people are getting beat by the police
11 force and nothing's being done about it. The police need
12 to stop using their power and abusing their power. They
13 need to start protecting us.

14 And we need to get our own policing in the
15 communities to stop the violence that's going on. And I
16 believe that the government needs just to bring in funding
17 from wherever and help us to help ourselves. They made us
18 helpless. They made us hopeless. They've done everything
19 in their power to make us just go down into the ground and
20 be dead.

21 But you know what? That can't happen any
22 more. The government needs to own up to what they've done
23 to our people. Our people are suffering big time. It's
24 just unbelievable what's going on in our communities, the
25 violence that's going on, people getting raped and sexually

1 abused and getting physically abused. And kids are getting
2 hurt. It's left, right, and centre. It's not stopping.

3 And somebody needs to do something about
4 this and get control of what's happening, you know? Like,
5 get people in there that are really going to help our
6 people, not people that are just going to take our money
7 and run. That's what's happening. People are taking our
8 money and running with it and making big bucks off us, and
9 it's not right.

10 And our people need help and the government
11 needs to -- and after this is over, I'm going to write a
12 letter. I'm going to write a letter to somebody about
13 what's going on with this -- with the kids in our world and
14 with the murdered and missing women. There's no justice
15 for our women. It's wrong, what's happening to our women.

16 I have a cousin -- we have a cousin that's
17 been missing for five years now. What are they doing to
18 find her? I don't think they're doing anything. They're
19 just saying they're doing something but they're not because
20 she should have been found by now. And her son misses her.
21 That's just like killing her.

22 But we need more help. And alcohol, I
23 remember at one point that alcohol used to be used to help
24 us to give information to the people that came from Europe
25 or wherever they came from on the boat and they gave the

1 people alcohol just to take advantage of them. And you
2 know, it's been all about the land and about the resources,
3 and where are we in this picture? We're poor.

4 And my mom's in the ground and that should
5 never have happened. My mother should be here right now
6 with me and my kids and my husband. That was stolen from
7 me, really stolen from me.

8 Yeah, the residential school
9 intergenerational has gone seven, eight years now, and it
10 needs to be stopped. Need to find the resources to help
11 our people, get our own police force back in the villages.
12 Find the funding to do it because when we had our own
13 police forces, at least the kids were home in bed at a
14 certain time and they were home safe with their parents.

15 But now, there's just no law in our
16 reserves. People are not taking care of their -- they're
17 not protecting our families. Even if somebody does some
18 kind of assault to the people, they don't do nothing about
19 it. They don't help us.

20 I want justice for my mom's death. There's
21 no justice in sweeping it under the carpet. I missed out
22 on a lot because my mom's not here and so does everybody
23 else that loses a parent or a child. It isn't right.

24 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** Thank you, Dorothy.

25 **At this time,** those are my questions. The

1 Commissioner might have a few questions for you.

2 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** Okay.

3 **COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON:** Thank you,
4 Dorothy. I do have one follow-up question if you don't
5 mind. You referred to residential schools a number of
6 times and the impacts, significant impact that that's had
7 and the intergenerational effects of that and the
8 government not doing enough.

9 So that's something we hear a lot about,
10 residential school, in this Inquiry and the impacts. So
11 and of course, at the end of the day, we have to make
12 recommendations to government about, you know, what we
13 think should be done.

14 So in that regard, do you have any
15 suggestions? Like, what do you think might be helpful in
16 terms of stopping the intergenerational effects of
17 residential schools or helping people heal from the effects
18 that's not being done? Is there anything from your
19 perspective in terms of actual programs or services that
20 you think would help?

21 **MR. ARCHIE POOTLASS:** Thank you. My wife
22 and I, we've discussed this several times and I may -- I
23 spent four years in residential school in Port Alberni.
24 And I experienced a lot of horror as well. You know, we
25 were tortured. We were brutalized like you wouldn't

1 believe, you know? Malnutrition, physical, emotional,
2 psychological abuse, you know, and sexual abuse. All of my
3 brothers, myself, every one of us went through this and we
4 were all sexually abused.

5 So when I came out of there, I had lost my
6 ability to love. Just ripped right out of me. My wife
7 talks about the -- how she's been impacted by this and I
8 have to tell you, I didn't know how to love. And my wife,
9 generationally impacted by me. I didn't love -- couldn't
10 love her. What I thought was love wasn't really love. But
11 money and a roof over their head, what would they -- stuff
12 like that. But nothing came from here, you know?

13 And I really appreciate her patience with
14 me, her understanding, you know? But I've been working on
15 my personal healing for a long time. Thirty-five (35)
16 years ago is when I first quit my weekend binges. I worked
17 hard but I played hard too. So but I put her through pure
18 hell, and my children. That's the intergenerational impact
19 to my wife and my children. I wasn't able to love the way
20 a man should.

21 I went to a lot of counselling through the
22 Indian Residential School Support Program, those resources
23 there, you know, and I appreciate that. But it couldn't
24 get me to the point where I wanted to be able to deal with
25 the deep pain inside. All the best psychiatrists in the

1 world couldn't help me with my mental health issues.

2 I lost a brother to suicide, another brother
3 too who burned in a house fire. You know, nephews,
4 suicide. So this is the kind of trauma that has impacted
5 us. It's still impacting us today.

6 So what I did though was, there is a program
7 that really helped me. And thanks to my wife, she knew
8 that I was -- that I intended well in trying to come to
9 some resolution to the residential school issue. She seen
10 that I was ready to walk away from it, not being able to
11 fully resolve that residential school syndrome.

12 Then she went to a program called Landmark,
13 and wow. When she came back home from that program I seen
14 the changes in her. Even when I seen that I was still in
15 denial. I don't think that could help me.

16 And then I paid for the program but I was
17 digging my heels in. I said, "No, this is not going to
18 help me. Nothing can help me."

19 She packed my bags and booted me out the
20 door and says, "Go on. Go and do it."

21 So I flew to Vancouver and wow, life
22 changing. Life changing. Two thousand sixteen (2016),
23 Mother's Day, first time ever I called my wife and she felt
24 the love that I had in my heart to her. I told her I love
25 her.

1 The Indian Residential School Support
2 Program did not help me with that because of the
3 restrictions of that program. Doesn't allow us to use
4 those resources as to how we see fit.

5 This is what you could do, you know? Those
6 resources, the Indian Residential School Support Program
7 should be a little more flexible to help our people who are
8 suffering from that syndrome still.

9 And our family is a real good example of
10 that, like every other First Nation families that have
11 experienced the residential school syndrome. There should
12 be more flexibility in those resources. We should be able
13 to determine how to best use those resources to help us.

14 I have an older brother who has never
15 received any counselling. He gave up. He says, "I'm not
16 going to go to any of those kind of therapies any more."

17 He went to this Landmark forum. And wow,
18 life changing for him. I couldn't believe the change I
19 seen in him, my older brother.

20 So you could help us by -- we're going to be
21 -- we're petitioning the Liberal government now to change
22 their policies regarding that support program. There
23 should be more flexibility there, all right?

24 My struggle is the ability to love and care
25 for my wife and family the way any man should. Finally, a

1 breakthrough. Pushed me right over the top, you know? My
2 daughter here, I told her I love her and it came from my
3 heart, and she never felt that love before. All my
4 children, my grandchildren, our grandchildren, they're
5 loving it. I'm healthy. They're getting a lot healthier.

6 But we still need a lot of help for them.
7 What we like to see is our whole family transform from
8 those resources that are being made available for us, the
9 restrictions on those resources, they're just -- you know,
10 to me, it's just a joke. We're kissing all those resources
11 goodbye. I seen these psychiatrists and psychologists and
12 nothing really working. When you see programs like this
13 that are effective to our family, wow.

14 But you have to understand too is we have
15 limitations in most of our communities. We're poverty
16 stricken. We can't afford the cost of the fees to purchase
17 arrangements to get into these types of programs.

18 That, I think, is the strongest
19 recommendation I could make to you. We really need to see
20 some changes in the Truth and Reconciliation efforts with
21 Canada. All is meant well, but not very effective to meet
22 our needs.

23 And secondly, what my wife is talking about
24 too is in terms of the policing. There's still a lot of
25 violence towards our women. She explained this to you.

1 And I, for one, I put her through pure hell,
2 emotional, psychological. I didn't know that, being the
3 victim of the residential school system. I didn't know
4 what I was doing to her until later in life. Then I
5 started to understand so I started trying to work on
6 myself. But she tolerated a lot, you know? She went
7 through pure hell in that, and a lot of -- in our homes and
8 our communities, that is still happening.

9 So the Residential School Support Program --
10 but the violence against our women is minimal in terms of
11 support from the policing. Could be a lot stronger.

12 I seen some of my daughters -- I wasn't
13 there when they were physically abused, big time. I was
14 with -- always out of our community and I wasn't able to
15 support them. But I should have gone to their communities,
16 wherever they were being beaten or whatever, and supported
17 them, you know? So the policing, it's not strong enough in
18 that respect towards our women.

19 Thank you.

20 **COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON:** Thank you.

21 **MS. DOROTHY POOTLASS:** Yeah, we did have one
22 incident that happened with my granddaughter. And there
23 were people that seen -- you know what? A lot of our
24 people live in fear. They're afraid to speak up because of
25 whatever standings they have in the community or whatever

1 it is.

2 But a policeman actually manhandled our
3 granddaughter, really violently manhandled her. And she
4 had medical records and everything that were in the medical
5 office. And we were trying to tell her, "You should go and
6 report this because this is not right, what he did to you."

7 That's not the only incident. There's a lot
8 of other incidents that are happening with the police
9 forces. They're not treating our women properly. They're
10 not treating our families properly. There's a lot of
11 violence and it's just not okay any more. Our people need
12 to be treated with honour and respect. We have done
13 nothing to be treated like this.

14 And the way my mother's death was treated,
15 that's not good enough. My mother deserved to be respected
16 for what happened to her.

17 And all the other women and all the other
18 people that have died because of violence is just not okay.
19 It's not okay any more. The government needs to do
20 something about it. Residential school people need to do
21 something about this. Trudeau needs to do something about
22 this. He promised and the other person that gave us the
23 Reconciliation thing way back when, you know, "I
24 apologize," with no emotions. Didn't mean a thing. They
25 need to step up to the plate and do what they promised that

1 they would do for us, us First Nations people.

2 We should never have to be burying -- I
3 should never have to be burying a child or burying my
4 mother. I should never have to be doing that. We should
5 be living long lives. The average First Nations person's
6 life is 35 years old.

7 My sister was living downtown in the east
8 end of Vancouver and she was beaten to death. What did
9 they do for her? They did nothing. So not the only
10 person. There's a lot of other people that suffered
11 violent deaths because people just don't care about us. We
12 need somebody to care. Enough is enough. We don't have to
13 be fearful to walk out the door and a police officer's
14 going to come and hurt us. We shouldn't be fearful of
15 that. We should be feeling safe.

16 That's the biggest recommendation that my
17 husband put out there. It needs to be dealt with. Our
18 people need to stop being hurt and start opening the doors
19 for us to get healing. Yeah.

20 **COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON:** Thank you so
21 much, Dorothy. Thank you for coming and sharing about your
22 mom and the impact that had on your life. I know it's very
23 difficult but I also want to thank you for sharing your
24 very strong recommendations with us and contributing to
25 participating in the work of the Inquiry today. So thank

1 you.

2 And thank you, Archie, too, for sharing your
3 recommendation. Appreciate it.

4 I also want to thank you your family for
5 being here for support too.

6 And if there's no other questions or
7 comments, we can wrap up. But before you go, we have a
8 small gift for you in recognition of the gift of your truth
9 that you've shared with us. And I'm going to ask
10 Grandmother "Blu" to speak to that.

11 **GRANDMOTHER LAUREEN "BLU" WATERS-GAUDIO:**

12 Dorothy, the Commissioner is going to offer you this token
13 of our appreciation which is an eagle feather to help you
14 with your journey, with your healing, and as well as a
15 package of wild strawberry seeds so that you can plant them
16 this summer or this spring now and you can watch them grow
17 and come into their being.

18 And we just want to thank you for sharing
19 this truth. These feathers have come from this territory.
20 They were collected by the matriarchs and they were given
21 to us so that we could hand them to our witnesses to help
22 with their healing journeys. So we want to extend this to
23 you for your healing journey. Thank you.

24 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** And Commissioner, if we
25 could adjourn this matter.

1 **COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON:** Okay. Let's
2 adjourn and I think the next session in here is six
3 o'clock.

4 **MR. THOMAS BARNETT:** I believe so.

5 **COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON:** Okay. Let's
6 adjourn now. Thank you.

7 --- Upon adjourning at 17:38

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LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

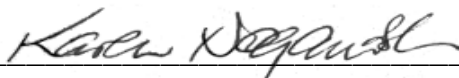
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16 I, Marie Rainville, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that
17 I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and
18 accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this
19 matter.

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Karen Noganosh

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April 17, 2018

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