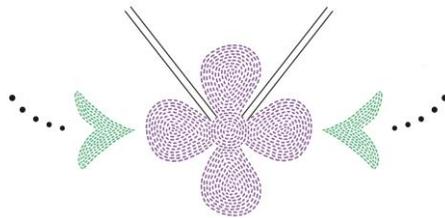


National Inquiry into  
Missing and Murdered  
Indigenous Women and Girls



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  
Siniktarvik Hotel & Conference Centre Salon A/B  
Rankin Inlet, Nunavut**



**PUBLIC**

**Tuesday February 20, 2018**

**Public Volume 46(a):  
Laura Mackenzie, In relation to her aunt Betsy Kalaserk;**

**Nikki Komaksiutiksak,  
In relation to her cousin Jessica Michaels;**

**Heard by Commissioners Qajaq Robinson & Michèle Audette**

**II**  
**APPEARANCES**

Assembly of First Nations            Julie McGregor (Legal counsel)

Government of Nunavut            Alexandre Blondin (Legal counsel)

Government of Canada            Anne McConville (Legal counsel)

Donna Keats (Legal counsel)

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of            Beth Symes (Legal counsel)

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Women's Association of

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Tumingit Regional Inuit

Women's Association Inc.,

Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre,

Manitoba Inuit Association

**Note:** For the purpose of establishing this record of attendance, counsel are considered present whether they attended one or all of the hearings held over the course of the day.

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Laura Mackenzie, In relation to her aunt Betsy  
Kalaserk

1 Rankin Inlet, Nunavut  
2 --- Upon commencing on Tuesday, February 20, 2018  
3 at 1:53 p.m.

4 **Hearing #1**

5 **Witness: Laura Mackenzie**

6 **In relation to her aunt Betsy Kalaserk**

7 **Heard by Commissioner Qajaq Robinson**

8 **Commission Counsel: Lillian Lundrigan**

9

10 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: (Speaking  
11 in Inuktitut).

12 THE INTERPRETER: Commissioner  
13 Qajaq is here with us. Thank you. Thank you,  
14 Laura, for being here for your testimonial this  
15 morning. We look forward to hearing your  
16 testimonial --

17 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: (Speaking in  
18 Inuktitut).

19 THE INTERPRETER: I will speak in  
20 English although I can speak Inuktitut but we are  
21 so influenced by the use of the English language  
22 that we have programmers that come from the south  
23 to work and a lot of times they don't provide us  
24 with their names, and I do apologize that I will be  
25 speaking in English. I apologize to the audience,

1 but as I speak, this will be aired across Canada,  
2 so I want to make my statement very clear about  
3 what it is I wish to speak of, of the wait and the  
4 burden I have carried with me for so long. So I  
5 will speak in that manner and I will speak from my  
6 heart honestly to you.

7 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: My name is  
8 Laura Mackenzie. I am a survivor of a murdered and  
9 missing Indigenous woman whose name was Betsy  
10 Kalaserk. She was 29 years old, and was raised in  
11 Rankin Inlet, Nunavut. But she was my aunt.  
12 There's a picture of her. Beautiful. The way I  
13 always see her. I grew up with her in Nunavut.  
14 You know, extended family is family regardless.

15 I considered her my sister because  
16 she was just a year younger than me and this is  
17 what I would like to say about her life that she  
18 was a child sexual abuse victim. That is correct.  
19 I must state that. I'm talking about it or will  
20 talk about it; how we can prevent children from  
21 going through what she went through. And that's  
22 why I'm here today.

23 It affected her relationships and  
24 the sexual abuse made her take her own life. It  
25 was a lifelong suicide and the work she did to harm

1 herself because of the sexual abuse. She could not  
2 recover from this. And the very people that should  
3 have protected her from this were the very ones  
4 that abused her.

5                   This was in the end that made her  
6 identity. It's important for the inquiry to  
7 understand the situation that led to the death of  
8 my aunt at the tender age of 29.

9                   She started off with the life of  
10 any normal child if you look from the outside, but  
11 that was not the case for this unfortunate child.  
12 The child came from the home where the traditional  
13 lifestyle had changed from the nomadic way of life  
14 to the community way of life. The nomadic way was  
15 harsh as you heard from the elders. It was a live  
16 or die society. It was cold and it was harsh.  
17 Many forms of abuse happened in the home. These  
18 forms of abuse were too common in the little  
19 communities, and this led to a dysfunctional  
20 lifestyle of alcohol, drug abuse, and self-harm.

21                   Both of Betsy's parents had  
22 parents that died at an early time of their life  
23 where the foundation building of a child would  
24 exist between parents, so other adults came into  
25 the picture to help raise the parents, which in

1 turn did not have the best outcome of the adults in  
2 the long run.

3                   There was many forms of abuse that  
4 had already started. This, in turn, brought many  
5 dysfunctional dysfunctions into the young couple's  
6 home, who eventually married and had over 13  
7 children. Many abuses were carried out. No one  
8 dealt with the issues till later, by the parents,  
9 by one of the parents, that was some of the  
10 children who wish to do so.

11                   When the communities came and the  
12 style to offer a wage and a free shack to live in  
13 was offered. I'm sure you hear of all these elders  
14 saying they were, "Come into the community, live in  
15 a shack." At least it's better than an igloo.  
16 Many opportunities came and the colonial lifestyle  
17 provided an advanced and easier way of living where  
18 the family could support themselves with the wage  
19 economy.

20                   All this type of living included  
21 the drugs, alcohol, and lots of sexual promiscuity  
22 that was rampant with the little Hudson Bay Liquor  
23 Store. This was the many problems that added to  
24 the dysfunction of a family home. Betsy Kalaserk  
25 had much strength. And then once I do recall was

1 her ability to be able to make friends so easily  
2 and the ability to see the bigger picture of not  
3 looking at the faults of others, she reminded me  
4 regularly. "Leave them alone. That's not your  
5 problem."

6 She was able to look past the bad  
7 in others and was always able to see the good in  
8 people. She made so many loyal and fierce friends  
9 that would defend her anytime and anywhere. Her  
10 talent was the ability to leave an imprint in your  
11 life.

12 She looked after my two older  
13 children and was always interacting and looking but  
14 very cautious as to anyone that would come in their  
15 harm's way. My daughter sitting there, she looked  
16 after her. She loved my second oldest child,  
17 Aangauk (ph), and she loved her I think more than  
18 her own. They had a special bond that no one could  
19 break, and I know this could never be replaced nor  
20 would I ask.

21 Her dreams, you ask. Thank you  
22 for asking about good things about these people.  
23 They must be remembered about the good things. She  
24 had many. She wanted to have a happy life, and she  
25 would have a home where she could have a happy,

1 healthy life with her children and her husband.  
2 She believed in God, and believed that anything  
3 that was done behind doors was always forgivable,  
4 and that people, no matter how bad things had been  
5 done to them, that we could go on and live the best  
6 happiest life with God as the centre of our life.  
7 She told me that, you know, a week before she  
8 passed away.

9 Her struggles though were real.  
10 She would stop drinking and then start drinking,  
11 and that would be a thorn in her life. And she  
12 didn't drink. She had a good steady group of  
13 friends and family that would help her any time and  
14 any day. I think her struggle was -- she wasn't  
15 able to cope. She did have counselling when she  
16 lived in Yellowknife, but the thing here that you  
17 must be aware, I don't know if the counselling was  
18 consistent if the support was consistent for her,  
19 that she needed it for her mental well-being. But  
20 she could not overcome the sexual abuse that she  
21 had encountered for many years and no one seemed to  
22 want to help.

23 The family and community have  
24 always may be in shame would not report or speak  
25 about the abuse. The only time the abuse was

1 mentioned was when another victim was abused, but  
2 for some reason, it would not be spoken or  
3 reported. The challenges she faced was her  
4 illiteracy, but she worked hard at learning to read  
5 and write as soon as she got into school.

6 She started school maybe 8 or 9.  
7 But when she did go, she excelled and was about to  
8 catch up in her grade level in just a couple years.  
9 You see those warning signs, people? Not sending  
10 a child to school? Let's not leave that kind of  
11 stuff. Let's quit turning a blind eye to this when  
12 we know. I'm sorry, I don't mean to be mad. I  
13 want to be a voice for her and children.

14 Even though she had Inuktitut as  
15 her first language, she was so smart and  
16 intelligent. She was able to catch up fast as  
17 ever. I was actually even envious when she started  
18 showing off. I said I don't want to see it.  
19 "Why?" I'm like I didn't want to say it. You  
20 know, sibling rivalry. You want to say because  
21 you're doing better. You don't want to admit to  
22 your sibling you're smarter or they're smarter.

23 Her challenges -- you must hear  
24 this -- were that she could not develop deep,  
25 personal relationships with a male. The male

1 relationship had been tarnished at a young age.  
2 She could not or did not know how to have a healthy  
3 relationship with a male. She tried her best to  
4 have a relationship, but there was always a parent  
5 interfering into the relationship. You see those  
6 signs again, everybody? It seemed like she was not  
7 allowed to have her husband.

8                   The only time that she was allowed  
9 to have a relationship was when she moved away and  
10 started having a real relationship. It didn't last  
11 long. Her self-esteem had been diminished at a  
12 young age and did not see herself worthy because of  
13 the shame of child sexual abuse. Her life skills  
14 were a challenge. I could see it when she wrote  
15 letters to me, gave me a call.

16                   Her boundaries at a young age were  
17 not developed appropriately, and this was due to  
18 the fact that it may have been generational factors  
19 with no proper parents to guide the parents growing  
20 up. Betsy knew what was wrong and what was right.

21 As soon as she was able to enter in this community  
22 and school, she functioned as well as anyone could  
23 in a small community but limited service, trust  
24 factors, confidentiality, small communities, women  
25 agencies. The trust factor with government

1 agencies was questionable at times. This was 20  
2 years ago.

3 Many social programs in the past  
4 have a history of colonialism or paternal that go  
5 against the traditional ways of social programming  
6 where in the Inuit ways, an Elder advisor, who has  
7 no criminal convictions -- sorry, I'm getting old.  
8 I can't see anymore. Yeah, sorry. I'm starting  
9 to get -- yeah, sorry, I got to use this -- this  
10 colonial paternal systems goes against the  
11 traditional ways of social programming where in the  
12 Inuit ways, an Elder advisor, who had no criminal  
13 convictions, would help, you know, of hurting or  
14 abusing was usually the leader of a small circle  
15 with advice as to how to handle any conflicts that  
16 arise in a household. That was taken. The  
17 communities' ways are now where people are  
18 reported, written down, and then go back to their  
19 home and discuss another action or plan. I call it  
20 the "reaction plan". It's a reaction. It's not a  
21 solution. We react.

22 This doesn't work for the family  
23 and will never work. Sexual abuse is not talked  
24 about. Many victims blame themselves or have a  
25 love-hate relationship with the abuser. Many

1 victims think if you don't talk about it, you won't  
2 be thought of as garbage or if people are aware of  
3 you being a victim, then you become a target for  
4 other predators that are around in the community.  
5 They know the vulnerable ones. They become  
6 targets. Maybe society likes to judge victims, but  
7 being quiet about it makes it worse.

8 Many victims such as Betsy end up  
9 killing themselves slowly because child sexual  
10 abuse is a silent killer. Her resilience was  
11 phenomenal. She had to deal with a lot of trust  
12 issues and decided to remove herself from the  
13 community of Rankin Inlet to produce a better life.  
14 I'm sure you guys heard that travelling all across  
15 Canada. They left for a better life in the city of  
16 Yellowknife.

17 She moved to Yellowknife in her  
18 mid-twenties, and I did see a positive change in  
19 her circumstance. I can tell you that. There were  
20 support systems in place there. She met a young  
21 First Nations man, who himself moved away from a  
22 small community east of Yellowknife, and they both  
23 were sober and young and full of life and wanted to  
24 have a family to build a better future for a little  
25 while. I want Jasa to know she tried her best to

1 be the mother she could. I know he's here. She  
2 tried her best.

3 Both couples were sober and  
4 probably attending meetings for sobriety, which I  
5 think she mentioned to me in a letter, but she was  
6 going to the AA program with her husband. They  
7 ended up having a son, who is now a young man, and  
8 his name is Jasa Kalaserk.

9 As you sit here, Jasa, I want you  
10 to know they love you dearly, and you are always  
11 the centre of their attention. You could tell in  
12 the pictures that I have still put away.

13 The fairy tale didn't last long.  
14 The abuse as a child started to seep into their  
15 relationship. People who have been abused think  
16 they're not allowed to have a good life. They  
17 constantly blame themselves and continue to self-  
18 harm by abusing themselves either through drugs,  
19 self-harm cutting, and even alcohol or possibly  
20 infidelity. You hear those things again? Self-  
21 harm, those are triggers. Listen.

22 A favourite memory I may have of  
23 her are many. I can't specifically say that I have  
24 one that really speaks to me, but I can share the  
25 memories that I do recall fondly. My memory of her

1 is when she looked after my children. We were  
2 close. When I moved to Arviat for a while and was  
3 trying to finish my school, she came over and  
4 decided she wanted to look after my child.

5 She decided that she would move  
6 away from where she had lived and decided to  
7 sacrifice her life as a young teen and help me with  
8 my child. It was wonderful to have a family member  
9 from my side who provided me the support I need to  
10 raise my child. She was a wonderful person.  
11 Always gave more love than I could possibly  
12 imagine. Another human can give to another  
13 person's child. This is my fond memory of her.  
14 Always cared for children. Always protected the  
15 children.

16 This is the hard part. And it  
17 took a while, and I thank the inquiry for  
18 challenging me on this question. It was a lot of  
19 reflection. How can the inquiry honour my loved  
20 one, Betsy Kalaserk? There are many ways you can  
21 honour a young woman's life in future generations  
22 of Inuit that will go ahead of her. As a young  
23 Indigenous Inuk woman, there are many ways that the  
24 inquiry can help. There are different ways and  
25 different levels that women, especially women in

1 small, remote northern communities, can get  
2 support. Can and should.

3                   The child sexual abuse that is  
4 rampant must be dealt with. There are way too many  
5 people killing themselves because of child sexual  
6 abuse or other forms of abuse. There are way too  
7 many family members in the communities that stay  
8 silent when a sexual predator is abusing their  
9 child or other children. The church seems to  
10 encourage the abuser by saying pray and forgive and  
11 not report the abuser, especially if it's a  
12 relative or a high standing official or a family  
13 member.

14                   These aren't easy for me to say or  
15 if it's a big family and the person's abusing, the  
16 smaller family members will get bullied into  
17 staying silent. I believe in God, but I don't  
18 believe God would want any child to be sexually  
19 abused continuously by a person. That's not the  
20 God I know. I think any person in a position of  
21 trust should report child sexual abuse or any  
22 abuse. I believe if a parent is sexually abusing a  
23 child, this should be reported and dealt with and  
24 the person that reports should be supported by the  
25 family members and the community.



1 listening to the elders' conversation. Maybe we  
2 have to look at this way instead.

3 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Listen,  
4 let's not do lateral violence to other family  
5 members in the community. That strong, old  
6 injustices from old family brawls seemed to be  
7 forwarded onto new generations. This must stop and  
8 leaders and head of households need to speak up and  
9 stop this picking on others to feel better about  
10 themselves.

11 The quality of life is always  
12 spoken like it's some kind of euphoria that only  
13 the elite of educated people, Inuit, non-Inuit can  
14 obtain when they remove themselves from their  
15 remote communities. The quality of life is  
16 different for the southern cities. Many can run  
17 away by taking a bus, hitching a ride, or drive to  
18 another place for a better, you know, jobs or  
19 services.

20 Women such as Betsy never was  
21 given the opportunity to have a better life. Those  
22 opportunities came to those who may have had family  
23 in higher levels of government or who hold high  
24 levels of office or maybe people who have good  
25 paying jobs. You have no chance of escaping. If

1 you don't have the means or family relations to  
2 climb the success ladder. Very few are fortunate  
3 to climb but do with a lot of barriers, you know,  
4 such as the glass ceiling. I'm sure you guys all  
5 understand that. Or bullying, you know.

6 A quality of life is achieved when  
7 children can grow up with no form of sexual or  
8 physical abuse. Prevention and teaching this would  
9 improve the lives of the community members. We  
10 need to elect people who are role models and have  
11 not been charged or is known to have done any  
12 sexual or physical abuse. We got to quit electing  
13 if we know they beat their wife or she beats her  
14 husband.

15 I know these aren't easy things  
16 for you guys to hear, but I want you to know it's  
17 not easy for me to say. We can no longer turn a  
18 blind eye to a politician that has beaten their  
19 spouse. This is degrading to the family unit. We  
20 must encourage and elect people to run who are  
21 against any abuse of any form and speak against it.

22 In order for women who were once,  
23 you know, children, need the following basic  
24 services that our southern counterparts have right  
25 from the get-go, a family doctor who is aware of

1 the family histories such as health, mental and  
2 emotional well-being, the family doctor is a long-  
3 term family member that ensures that the family  
4 unit is healthy till pretty much the end of their  
5 life.

6 We in the remote communities don't  
7 have this consistently. Some don't even have it.  
8 I just thought of it. We're lucky in Rankin and  
9 Iqaluit. This is detriment to our society  
10 especially with the colonial trauma caused by  
11 residential school, child sexual abuse. We are  
12 fortunate to have a visiting doctor come to Rankin  
13 to speak with everyone that can have the courage to  
14 go and seek the doctor. I think he's located here,  
15 the doctor that is paid by the federal government,  
16 I think that independent, you know, TRC thing, but  
17 there's a little sign and they advertised it on  
18 Facebook and stuff like that, but who qualifies?  
19 Like, what's the definition if you're, you know,  
20 not truly bilingual, you know.

21 Child sexual abuse specialist is  
22 critical and is needed in the communities. Persons  
23 who can work to ensure that children who have been  
24 abused will not be, like Betsy, and set a life  
25 sentence of making sure they're not set to kill



1                   So I'll speak about something very  
2 sad. I'm saddened to date that our community of  
3 Rankin Inlet has yet to find out who has killed an  
4 11-year-old boy in Rankin Inlet. Why is this  
5 community staying silent about this horrendous act  
6 that has happened to this child, and yet there are  
7 people in this town who know who have murdered this  
8 innocent kid.

9                   Yes, an 11-year-old cousin of mine  
10 was murdered this summer and no one is telling,  
11 willing to tell what has happened. He's my son's  
12 age. And the literal violence that I hear on  
13 social media on him being wrapped in a tarp, that's  
14 lateral violence again. How could people just tap  
15 on the little thing and have no feelings? It hurts  
16 my cousin. I'm extremely saddened when I see the  
17 father walking each day with his head down, and I  
18 know it pains him every day that his child is not  
19 here. Where is the empathy? Eleven years old.  
20 Somebody is protecting a murderer. Where's the  
21 pain? Where's the empathy? We have to find the  
22 courage to tell the truth. Who has murdered that  
23 child? Report it. His parents are suffering every  
24 day. I see them. My cousin every day walking with  
25 his head down. It affects me. I know people think

1 I'm strong, but I feel for him. Eleven-year-old  
2 little boy. What a way to die.

3 Long-term solutions are required.  
4 They require capacity, resources at the  
5 communities, and Nunavut. I think Rebecca Williams  
6 was here. She used to be the Deputy Minister of  
7 Family Services. She understands. (Speaking in  
8 Inuktitut).

9 THE INTERPRETER: I know Rebecca  
10 Williams went through a very hard time as she dealt  
11 with this issue trying to deal with these heavy  
12 burdens.

13 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: -- that was  
14 ensuring that we have front line workers who can  
15 help the survivors grow resilient and ensure that  
16 they can take up the cause and become leaders in  
17 their communities. Lateral violence must end. The  
18 continue putting down of each other will not stop  
19 until we have individuals heal from the  
20 unaccountable actions made against the victims.

21 I'll start talking about the court  
22 now. (Speaking in Inuktitut).

23 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: (Speaking  
24 in Inuktitut).

25 THE INTERPRETER: What you believe

1 is a reliable.

2 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: (Speaking in  
3 Inuktitut).

4 THE INTERPRETER:

5 The court case was carried out in  
6 this city of Yellowknife in the Northwest  
7 Territories. Just to give some background.

8 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Jasa, is  
9 your girlfriend here? Susan is Jasa's girlfriend.  
10 I want her to listen. She's never heard the  
11 story. I want you to listen to his story.

12 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: Do you  
13 want me to give you a few minutes to read it?

14 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yes.

15 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: I've given  
16 copies to Commissioner Qajaq the Reasons for  
17 Judgment and sentencing in the court case of Ian in  
18 the matter of Betsy Kalaserk in the NWT court in  
19 Yellowknife.

20 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: I won't  
21 speak that in detail, Qajaq, but I will give you a  
22 general thing. Working as government, you always  
23 have to read documents and then brief somebody in  
24 two sentences, so I'll give you that, okay, for  
25 free.

1                                   When my aunt died, her husband was  
2 charged with second-degree murder. He got four  
3 years, but got off two years for good behaviour. I  
4 was researching and found that if you're charged  
5 with second-degree murder in jurisdictions such as  
6 Ontario -- and this is Google, so I don't know if  
7 Google's that good, okay, so I may be wrong -- but  
8 I think the Ontario justice system, looking at  
9 their information, was probably valid.

10                                   Domestic homicide of an unarmed  
11 partner has a range of 12 to 17 years particularly  
12 aggravating feature for a penalty of a greater-than  
13 cases. So, do you see the leniency with the  
14 Aboriginal being less than an average penalty in  
15 another province? 12 to 17 years. (Speaking in  
16 Inuktitut).

17                                   THE INTERPRETER: In the justice  
18 system accordingly, he should have been convicted  
19 of a penalty of 12 to 17 years, but that was not  
20 the case. He was convicted for two years. That is  
21 not fair. This was a human being.

22                                   MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: If you go to  
23 the Canadian law animal offence cruelty, if you  
24 endanger an animal, you can be charged under the  
25 Canadian law. Punishment can be five years. If

1 you look at the story, where my Indigenous Inuk  
2 Aunt Betsy Kalaserk's spouse was given two years  
3 for this paints our criminal law that speaks that  
4 our animal's laws are above Indigenous women.  
5 Their life is more. Is that what our lawmakers,  
6 policy makers, want to convey to the world, that  
7 Indigenous lives don't matter? Or will we really  
8 look into the systemic issues facing Indigenous  
9 women, Inuit, that their lives matter as much as  
10 any other women in Canada and the world.

11                   Again, I say her life didn't  
12 matter to the judge and the jury, but her life did  
13 matter to the family, today, that sits and grieves  
14 for her. She mattered to me, that I stand here  
15 today, on radio to say that she could have lived  
16 and had a life. If only she was not abused and  
17 that the system and community failed and turned a  
18 blind eye to the things that happened to her. It  
19 was only when she left the community that help was  
20 given, but there could have been help at the very  
21 young age when her life could have turned around  
22 for the better. Those are the things that don't  
23 make me sleep at night. Those are the things I get  
24 up three in the morning. What if, what if, what  
25 if.

1                                   We need to review our judicial  
2 system to ensure that when an Indigenous person is  
3 killed or murdered that the jury be Indigenous.  
4 That there be no bias to the jury. We can't  
5 completely delete biases. I know that. But we can  
6 ensure if an Indigenous woman is murdered, that the  
7 jury is Indigenous. And I'm a woman, I'm going to  
8 ask more than I'm allowed, a full representation of  
9 women on the jury.

10                                  I also want people to know the  
11 inquiry to advertise to the average Canadian that  
12 is watching on TV. As an Inuk, we pay the highest  
13 taxes in Canada. And as a taxpayer, I should have  
14 the basic health and education services that  
15 everyone in southern Canada has. I think I was  
16 fighting with my husband about how many per cent  
17 taxes we pay. It's quite a lot. We must be given  
18 equal opportunity to have the same health workers  
19 that every Canadian has in southern Canada. It's  
20 our equal right. I pay more taxes than most people  
21 down south.

22                                  Last but not least, Qajaq, I would  
23 recommend that after the inquiry is completed, that  
24 similar to the -- I'll give you this, so you don't  
25 have to write it all -- Truth and Reconciliation, a

1 report is made, but I must stress that independent  
2 body be created from this inquiry to ensure that  
3 the framework, recommendations are brought forward.  
4 Policies be created at every level of government,  
5 but they be actioned in a timely plan. This will  
6 instill true reconciliation to the women who are  
7 the creators of life.

8                   If we want healthy communities, we  
9 must ensure our women are strong and able to be  
10 supported, so communities can thrive and grow into  
11 the quality of life everyone is speaking of.

12                   As a survivor, I want people to  
13 know that they should never be ashamed of what has  
14 happened to them. I want people to know that  
15 speaking to a professional about this is very vital  
16 to the well-being of your mind. There's no shame.

17                   And if I can leave that with you as a message, I  
18 want people to know that. I want to thank the  
19 inquiry for coming to my beautiful cold town. And  
20 I was even going to freeze my legs, but I needed to  
21 wear red. I always have to make a statement. And  
22 I anticipate and wait to see the recommendations  
23 will come into force. I believe it. I believe  
24 they will. You have my support.

25                   I want to thank my husband,

1 Richard, who's been my rock. He's been really  
2 helping me to be honest with myself. And I want to  
3 thank Lynn, my support who's made me grow and  
4 challenge myself to who I need to be. I really  
5 appreciate it. I want to thank Crystal, Jasa, who  
6 had to find the courage within themselves to  
7 revisit the whole ordeal and for supporting me. I  
8 really hope it brings closure to you guys. I  
9 really hope. I want to thank Mary Fredlund, who  
10 cannot be here. She's one of the counsellors who  
11 has been very honest with me to find my truth.  
12 Sandra Nichol, my friend who's always fighting for  
13 women, especially women's Indigenous rights.  
14 Theresie Tungilik, I think she's here. I want to  
15 thank her, too, from the Status of Women Council.  
16 Rebecca Kudloo from Qullit. She has been my  
17 strong mind when I'm weak. She has been the go-to  
18 person that when I wanted to give up, she lifted me  
19 up mentally. Thank you. (Speaking in Inuktitut).

20 THE INTERPRETER: I'd like to  
21 thank the elders whose names I will not state at  
22 this time. I love you. I thank you for your  
23 strong minds that we can speak today. And I was  
24 told one time that the elders carry a strength that  
25 I can reach out to in times of weakness and sure

Laura Mackenzie, In relation to her aunt Betsy  
Kalaserk

1 enough, it has been true for me. Thank you.

2 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: -- if I have  
3 forgotten to mention your name for being an ear. I  
4 needed someone to hear this difficult story. I  
5 have sudden confidence and have finally written it.

6 I'm thankful to you if I haven't mentioned your  
7 name. There are many, I hope after hearing my  
8 story, will be able to tell their story and find a  
9 reason to move from this inquiry to a whole new  
10 level of healing. Thank you.

11 MS. LILLIAN LUNDRIGAN: (Speaking  
12 in Inuktitut).

13 THE INTERPRETER: Thank you Laura.  
14 Your comments are strong. Good. We take them as  
15 Inuit.

16 MS. LILIAN LUNDRIGAN: --  
17 powerful, empowering. (Speaking in Inuktitut).

18 THE INTERPRETER: I want to ask  
19 Commissioner Qajaq Robinson if you have any  
20 questions for Laura, you can ask the questions now.

21 QUESTIONS BY COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

22 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:  
23 (Speaking in Inuktitut).

24 THE INTERPRETER: Thank you. I do  
25 have questions. Before we start, I believe you're

1 here for a reason. For the truth I know that. I  
2 recognize it, your heart, your mind. You came here  
3 today, and you spoke your truth, and we're told by  
4 our elders that's how we have to bring things out.

5 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

6 Quyanainni for coming and sharing  
7 with us about Betsy's life of the fond memories,  
8 the happy memories, the joys, her dreams, her  
9 strength, her resilience, and also what she went  
10 through.

11 And I want to just talk a little  
12 bit about this because I think a lot of people who  
13 are listening, particularly in the South, might not  
14 understand this. You know, so she died 20 years  
15 ago at 29, so within less than 50 years ago, Inuit  
16 were still living out in the communities. They  
17 weren't here, so there's been a tremendous amount  
18 of change that has happened, and even the community  
19 of Rankin Inlet has changed so much. Could you  
20 talk a little bit more about that? Would that be  
21 something you're comfortable with?

22 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Yes. I'm  
23 glad you're saying that. Being married to a non-  
24 Indigenous individual, who I love a lot, I've  
25 learned to understand their ways of living that



1 realized we better send these kids to school so  
2 they can replace people that come and fly in, fly  
3 out for a while to work.

4 So, it was thought in a good way.

5 I think a lot of things were thought in a good  
6 way, but what happened was everybody had their own  
7 little tribe in the outside communities, okay, and  
8 everybody came from different regions or different  
9 communities, and then they came in and then we had  
10 to adjust being together. You know, it's a culture  
11 shock. It's like imagine a bunch of us out of  
12 nowhere had to go into -- and I know it sounds  
13 crazy, but it really is this kind of thought -- is  
14 when people prepared to live on Mars and, you know,  
15 there's 20 people deciding they're going to get on  
16 this capsule and live on Mars, and they're the  
17 wealthy people that have to adjust living with each  
18 other.

19 That's how you really have to  
20 think about it -- is that you've made people come  
21 and force to live with each other with no choice.  
22 And that creates a lot of tension and then there  
23 was leaders of each family, you know, kind of  
24 thing, and there's, you know, one leader becomes  
25 leader for everybody when there was four leaders in

1 each of their community or little groups. And  
2 there was no succession plan or, you know,  
3 adjusting on paper. It was like here. You guys  
4 learn to get along, and it's taken a while to, you  
5 know, get your roots into these communities and  
6 build.

7 Inuit are resilient and it's  
8 always going back to elders who say, yes, we live  
9 this way, but we live this way now. How you can  
10 move forward is: I have these, but you need to  
11 tell me how you think it could fix. So there's  
12 always that wanting to fix it together and their  
13 raw honesty on how to fix things has been amazing  
14 is what I can explain. I hope that does explain  
15 about remote communities as opposed to southern.

16 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yes,  
17 very much, and if I'm correct in that same time  
18 frame, there were two residential schools not too  
19 far in these areas as well; is that correct?

20 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Yes, and  
21 that had a big impact. I do recall, I have my  
22 Cousin Susan here, we do recall my family moving  
23 away from Chester, so there was a group of family  
24 moving away from Chesterfield Inlet and moving  
25 closer out here, not right in the community.

1                   The thing that I heard, you know,  
2 listening to elders having tea, was there was a  
3 school in Chester, but then there was a school  
4 here, but it wasn't -- it was a day school, federal  
5 day school, so they were, like, hearing things that  
6 weren't going well, you know, with all the sexual  
7 abuse in residential school in Chester, and I think  
8 they brought every child to that place, you know,  
9 and they were raised there really young. Parents  
10 were -- you know, 5 years old, taken from them to  
11 nothing.

12                   But I do recall there was two --  
13 and I think a lot of people that I hear that moved  
14 here were saying, "At least we can keep the kids at  
15 night," because they were hearing of things, but  
16 they weren't too sure, and -- you know, you're  
17 going to listen to your priest if there's something  
18 going on. Of course, you're going to believe them  
19 when the superintendent of the community says this  
20 is what it is, so you try and be law-abiding  
21 citizens when you come into a community.

22                   It was to the point, one day, my  
23 grandparents were saying they were in Chesterfield  
24 Inlet, and they were told, "You need to bring your  
25 kids to school," and they were like, "No, no, we're

1 not too sure. You know, we're hearing things,  
2 like, we're not really," so they had hesitance, and  
3 they said, "Well, we're going to take them." And  
4 so, they said no, no, no. They had a matriarch who  
5 said no way, so they moved here. And so, they said  
6 at least if they go to school here, it's just a day  
7 school.

8                                   It was quite interesting that they  
9 said they weren't sending them regularly to school  
10 because during the schools, day school here, kids  
11 would be really hard sticks and humiliated kind of  
12 thing. I'm sure it happened everywhere, but there  
13 was different degrees of humiliation that are  
14 unacceptable. I understand that.

15                                   But to the point that my  
16 grandparents were given a paper and they said,  
17 "Here, if you bring your kid to school, you'll get  
18 this," and they said, "What is it," because they  
19 were self-sufficient, and they said family  
20 allowance, and they said, "What do I need family  
21 allowance for? I made the kids. I'm going to feed  
22 them. I don't need it," to the point that -- I  
23 don't know if it was their way of being resistant,  
24 but they used the common stove or they needed  
25 something to burn like the qulliq or something that

1 they took the cheque and used it to light the fire,  
2 so I don't know if it was they're way of saying,  
3 "Get lost. You're not going to control me and my  
4 kids." So that was the life that, you know, my  
5 grandparents lived.

6 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I  
7 want to talk to you a little bit about -- actually,  
8 one other question -- and in terms of the  
9 introduction of alcohol, it was around that same  
10 time there was a Hudson's Bay Liquor Store, so that  
11 overlapped with the transition into town, the  
12 residential schools, and the introduction of  
13 alcohol. Okay. I just want to make sure that that  
14 context is captured, so thank you.

15 Few questions about Betsy and  
16 really around this culture of silence, and you've  
17 identified lots of reasons why that happens and the  
18 impact of that, and when there's a movement --  
19 right now across the world, really, if you think  
20 about it. How do you -- you spoke about having  
21 frontline child sexual abuse specialists about  
22 educating really looking up prevention and early  
23 intervention. At the time when Betsy was here in  
24 Rankin and being subjected to the abuse, what kind  
25 of services were available here then, and then what

1 do you see as available now?

2 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Very good  
3 question. There was a way of -- you know, the  
4 whole scooping and sixties scooping where kids were  
5 taken, unfit homes, and we do see that doesn't  
6 work. We understand that now. I think if things  
7 were reported for others, I think -- to what I  
8 heard was the definition of severity of abuse, so  
9 I've known people that have been taken and moved to  
10 other communities if they've been really been  
11 abused. So I think the reporting would have  
12 helped. I think that's key.

13 And you're asking me about  
14 currently how is it. So that's a fine line and a  
15 very two-edged sword to speak about in communities.  
16 There's the progressive women such as me, who  
17 really believe in the end result of what we need  
18 kind of thing for the child. So for me,  
19 ultimately, when I talk about a child, I say I want  
20 a healthy child right to the end, and then there's  
21 people saying, you know, when they've been scooped,  
22 they're saying, "Maybe if I was Native, I wouldn't  
23 have all these issues," you know, or "Maybe if I  
24 was put in a Native home, I would be better off."  
25 I cannot answer that, but I can answer that I've

1 seen and heard of people who are in their fifties  
2 who have been given to other family members in  
3 another community and have lived a really good  
4 life. And I know that has worked for them.

5 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: So  
6 safety and support at an early, early age as much  
7 as possible and is needed is the key intervention.

8 MS. LAURA MACKENZIE: Yes, yes,  
9 and also, if you're going to take a child from a  
10 home that has been abused in any form, when you're  
11 giving it to another relative or another family,  
12 make sure their assessed, and make sure that  
13 they've been diagnosed if they have any learning  
14 disabilities or emotional -- what kind of emotional  
15 intelligence they are, so the foster parents or the  
16 relatives that take this child are aware of any  
17 impediments that the child may have instead of just  
18 placing the child there and saying (Speaking in  
19 Inuktitut), but if there's --

20 Abuse causes developmental delays.  
21 Let's be honest with these people and say they may  
22 be delayed emotionally, they may not be reading  
23 properly, they may have bed -- wetting their bed,  
24 you know, because of this trauma. They may not  
25 trust a man or a woman. So those kind of things is

1 working to ensure that the child is safe, but also  
2 prevention, you know.

3 I was the president of the Safe  
4 Shelter for eight years, and we wanted to roll out  
5 this program about safeTALK with little kids in the  
6 day cares in schools where there's a little book  
7 about, you know, you can't be touched and stuff  
8 like that.

9 I think we should be rolling that  
10 out in Nunavut kind of thing and then having the  
11 real discussion if this really does happen and  
12 there's high reported incidents of child, we need  
13 to make sure our communities are ready to take  
14 these children in or also have some long-term  
15 solutions so this child is healthy. We want to  
16 prevent if we can.

17 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: You  
18 answered my next question. This is a theme, like,  
19 this is a pattern I'm seeing in many of the  
20 communities we go to, and one particular said as a  
21 little girl, she felt it was wrong, but nowhere  
22 else in her world was it being confirmed that this  
23 was wrong, so she -- it was only later in life.

24 So, those sort of preventions are  
25 teaching kids to know to report, right? So you

1 answered my last question before I answered it.  
2 Did any of what I raised trigger any questions for  
3 you? Okay. (Speaking in Inuktitut).

4 THE INTERPRETER: These are my  
5 only questions. I thank you again and thank you  
6 for inviting us to Rankin, and we look forward to -  
7 - we are here now. Thank you very much. As well,  
8 you give us this information, so we want to give  
9 you -- one of them is from us. From the inquiry  
10 and the other one is an eagle feather from the  
11 women in Haida Gwaii.

12 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: --  
13 their love and support through a symbolic gesture,  
14 so they've been gathering eagle feathers to give to  
15 people who are coming to share and Paul Tootik (ph)  
16 has also brought and is presenting gifts to you as  
17 well, tea cozies made from manga (ph), so (Speaking  
18 in Inuktitut).

19 THE INTERPRETER: I'm going to  
20 shut this off now, and I'm going to give you these  
21 gifts.

22 COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:  
23 Thank you. This concludes Laura's story, and we'll  
24 break for lunch, I believe. Speaking in  
25 Inuktitut).

1 THE INTERPRETER: We will resume  
2 at 1 o'clock. There is food and lunch provisions  
3 here if you wish to stay for lunch. Thank you.  
4 --- Recess at 11:40 a.m.  
5 --- Upon resuming at 1:05 p.m.  
6 --- Exhibits (code P01P00P0101)  
7 Exhibit 1: Digital image  
8 displayed during Laura  
9 Mackenzie's public testimony  
10 Exhibit 2: September 30, 2004  
11 transcript of Reasons for  
12 Judgment in the matter of R.  
13 v. Ian Adam Kirby, 2004 NWTSC  
14 68 (Docket S-1 CR2003000103)  
15 Exhibit 3: October 25, 2004  
16 transcript of Reasons for  
17 Judgment in the matter of R.  
18 v. Ian Adam Kirby, 2004 NWTSC  
19 73 (Docket S-1 CR2003000103)

20 **Hearing #2**

21 **Witness: Nikki Komaksiutiksak**

22 **In relation to her cousin Jessica Michaels**

23 **Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette**

24 **Commission Counsel: Fanny Wylde**

25

Nikki Komaksiutiksak, In relation to her cousin  
Jessica Michaels

1 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Good afternoon.  
2 Commissioner Audette, I would like to present to  
3 you our first witness of this afternoon. This is  
4 Nikki Komaksiutiksak, who will be sharing the story  
5 of Jessica Michaels, who died at the age of 17  
6 years old in the region of Winnipeg. Before  
7 I introduce you to her, Mr. Registrar, if you can  
8 please swear in the witness. She would like to  
9 give us an affirmation.

10 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Good afternoon  
11 Nikki. Do you solemnly after affirm the evidence  
12 you give will be the truth, the whole truest and  
13 nothing about the truth.

14 AFFIRMED: NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK

15 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you. So,  
16 good afternoon, Nikki. Maybe if you could  
17 introduce yourself to Commissioner Audette and as  
18 well your support person beside you.

19 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Hi, I'm  
20 Nikki Komaksiutiksak, and I have my husband, Jason  
21 Vandenbrink, here with me, and my aunt, Marie  
22 Michael (ph).

23 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you. Can  
24 you please specify what was your relation with  
25 Jessica Michaels?

1 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Jessica  
2 Michaels is my first cousin biologically, but I  
3 called her my sister because we lived together from  
4 the time that we were born.

5 MS. FANNY WYLDE: So what would  
6 you like to share this afternoon about Jessica's  
7 story?

8 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So I  
9 didn't write anything down, so I have it all kind  
10 of coming from my heart.

11 Me and Jessica are a month and a  
12 couple weeks apart. She would be 34 years old  
13 today, or her 34th birthday is coming up March  
14 23th. She was born in March 23rd, 1984, and she --  
15 we lived together, like, really, like my mom and my  
16 aunt, being sisters and quite close from what I  
17 remember, me and Jessica.

18 My anaanatsiaq would make matching  
19 clothes for me and her to wear because we were almost  
20 like twins, like there's pictures of us swearing  
21 matching outfits, the red one. I remember that.

22 We lived in Nunavut for the first  
23 years of our life; Chester, Rankin, and then  
24 Jessica moved with Marie to the Fort Smith, and I  
25 kind of wandered around Nunavut with my mom. So I



1 in every way, shape, and form. We're talking like  
2 extension words, hangers, being stabbed, being  
3 sewn. When we would have an open cut, she would  
4 sew us up with a needle and a thread. It was  
5 horrible and for stupid reasons, you know.

6                   When Jessica was 13 years old,  
7 both her and I had the courage to run away from  
8 that abuse in Winnipeg and from there, we moved  
9 from group home to group home, foster home to  
10 foster home, never once being offered to live with  
11 any other family members. That's when we became  
12 disconnected from our family. We didn't know who -  
13 - I mean, even still, like, to this day, I don't  
14 know who may family -- like, I don't know who they  
15 are. I only became connected to them six years  
16 ago.

17                   So, being young and living in a  
18 big city and not having anyone, any family members  
19 or anyone to, like, hold your hand and help  
20 navigate, you know, the system or anything, like,  
21 it was hard. And unfortunately, because of all of  
22 the trauma that Jessica faced from the time she was  
23 born to the time that we were -- from home to home,  
24 unfortunately, she turned to a different way of  
25 life in Winnipeg.

1                   At the age of 14, she was working  
2 the streets for money. She was hooked on crack  
3 cocaine. At 14 years old, like that's crazy, you  
4 know, and I believe if we would have family or  
5 someone there with us, she wouldn't have gone down  
6 that road. But we had no one.

7                   When I was 13; she was 13, we were  
8 placed in a home in Winnipeg with foster parents  
9 that were -- they were white people that helped  
10 Inuit for medical in Winnipeg. And they were nice  
11 enough to invite us into their home and give us a  
12 life of -- even if it was eight months, it was a  
13 healthy life. It was normal. There was no  
14 hitting; there was no starving; there was peace and  
15 laughter.

16                  So they gave us a chance of that  
17 little bit of life, but because of all of the  
18 trauma that we had endured from birth to then, it  
19 was too hard for them to handle, so they couldn't  
20 really keep us anymore because they lived outside  
21 of the city, and we needed services for treatment  
22 and counselling and therapy.

23                  So I lost track of Jess for about  
24 a year and a half because I was 15, and I was  
25 pregnant with my first child, and she was

1 unfortunately following a different lifestyle than  
2 myself. Then we became reacquainted after my son  
3 was born. And I'll never forget because she came  
4 to my home -- I had my own place, and I had my son,  
5 and I was pregnant with my second already -- and  
6 she was already mixed up in that lifestyle, and she  
7 came over and she visited, and -- I'll never  
8 forget, she bought pink wafer cookies for my son,  
9 and ever since then, those were his favourite --  
10 she told me that she wanted to quit smoking crack  
11 and that she didn't want to live that life anymore.

12 We were 17 when she was telling  
13 this to me, so she had already been a couple years  
14 deep into that life. And so, I took a piece of  
15 paper and I said, "Okay, let's write down  
16 everything that you can do to keep busy, like let's  
17 find a job, volunteer somewhere, go to school,  
18 like, we'll do it together," you know.

19 And then right after that, this  
20 was the first time I knew what crack cocaine looked  
21 like and she showed them to me. She had a couple  
22 pieces, and I grabbed them from her, and I flushed  
23 them down the toilet. I said okay, "I'll help you.  
24 This is how I'll help you," and she was so mad at  
25 me and I couldn't understand why. And it wasn't

1 until she called her friend to pick her up, and  
2 this is the man that was supplying her with the  
3 crack. This was the man that gave her a roof over  
4 her head and sold her to different people. It  
5 wasn't until after her death that I understood why  
6 she was so mad at me. It was because of who he was  
7 and how scared she was of him.

8                               So in between, you know, group  
9 homes, foster homes, being on the streets, being  
10 addicted to drugs and alcohol, being in trouble  
11 with the law, being locked up in youth centres and  
12 going back out and going back in, at one point, she  
13 came to Rankin Inlet. I think she was 15. Lasted  
14 a month and a half because she had too much trauma  
15 that she had to deal with, and she didn't know how  
16 to deal with it, and unfortunately, my family  
17 members didn't understand, so she had to come back  
18 to Winnipeg.

19                               So, a week before her death,  
20 that's when she had come over and we had talked  
21 about what we can do to help her with not doing  
22 crack and not living that life and me writing it  
23 down on paper. And she was telling me stories  
24 about how, you know, some of the girls that they  
25 found in Winnipeg murdered were some of her



1 Monday morning, and I got a phone call at 8:00  
2 a.m., and my foster parents found out before I did  
3 that her body had been found.

4                               So they did their investigations  
5 and they spoke to the people that were there, and  
6 they deemed her death as a suicide. It wasn't  
7 until after, I mean, I was young and I had been  
8 going through trauma for so long that I didn't  
9 really understand the dynamics of investigations  
10 and who you talk to, but when I got a little bit  
11 older and just having this feeling that it just did  
12 not seem like a Jessica thing to do. And I was  
13 speaking to my foster parents and getting the  
14 results of the investigation when I was much older  
15 and healthier that it didn't match.

16                               When they found Jess in Winnipeg  
17 in that rooming house, she was on her knees. She  
18 had an extension cord wrapped around her neck. She  
19 had an X-Acto knife in one hand. The cord that was  
20 wrapped around her neck behind her was the window  
21 that had bars on it, and she was kneeling down,  
22 therefore, she could have just stood up. When  
23 you're -- I mean, I'm not a doctor and I'm not any  
24 kind of, like, person that studies this stuff, but  
25 anyone that is, like, kneeling down and trying to

1 hang themselves when they can't breathe, you would  
2 think that they would be able to stand up or grasp  
3 for some air.

4 I mean, the toxicology test showed  
5 that she had so much crack cocaine in her system  
6 that a grown man's heart could have busted. That  
7 is what it says in the toxicology test. How does  
8 that make sense? If you're so high and you're  
9 kneeling on your knees and you have an X-Acto knife  
10 in your hand and bruises and scratch marks all over  
11 your hands and your arms, like, none of that makes  
12 sense. It doesn't -- and given the story that she  
13 told me one week before they found her body, that  
14 the man that supplied her with crack, it just kind  
15 of makes sense that he could have been responsible,  
16 him and whoever else he was associated with.

17 That's what I truly honestly  
18 believe because Jessica was the kind of person that  
19 when she was in distress or even if she was high,  
20 she would call my -- like, our foster parents every  
21 single time. Every single time she was in pain,  
22 she needed help, she needed out of something, she  
23 always called my foster parents and she did not  
24 call them once that weekend.

25 What's even more of a tragedy is

1 that she was deemed a runaway. She was missing  
2 when they found her body. She had run away from  
3 the youth centre, the juvenile centre, and she was  
4 a child in care, and she --

5 Even after her death, we had her  
6 funeral in Winnipeg. My foster parents put the  
7 funeral on and hundreds of people showed up because  
8 we were well-known throat singers in Winnipeg, and  
9 when it was time to bring her body back home to  
10 Chester, CFS, the justice system, Nunavut, no one  
11 wanted to pay for her body to come back home and  
12 that really hurt. Why? Why a young girl, 17 years  
13 old that's from Nunavut, her roots are here and no  
14 one wanted her back home. My foster parents were  
15 on the verge of selling their house just to bring  
16 her body back home.

17 These years and years of  
18 disconnect for these -- for us young ones and even  
19 today, when you got disconnected from your family,  
20 you're almost like a nobody and that's how I felt.  
21 All these years of injustice to Jess, even after  
22 her death was disgusting.

23 QUESTIONS BY MS. FANNY WYLDE:

24 MS. FANNY WYLDE: If we could take  
25 a few steps back. Let's go back to your childhood.

1 You mentioned that you were growing up here in  
2 Nunavut and that you were moving from places to  
3 places. For our better understanding, can you  
4 explain why you weren't with your biological  
5 parents?

6 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So I  
7 was born in Winnipeg, and my mom and dad were still  
8 together and -- like three weeks after I was born,  
9 we came back, I think, to Chester and then to  
10 Rankin, I think, after with my dad, and when I was  
11 3, my dad died from a massive heart attack and I  
12 think -- like even when my mom and dad were  
13 together, it wasn't a healthy relationship. There  
14 was alcohol and abuse on both parties from what I  
15 remember at the mere age of 3.

16 When my dad passed away, to me,  
17 from what I remember and how I feel, that's when my  
18 mom went way down. She was more of an alcoholic,  
19 and she couldn't take care of me and keep me safe  
20 in Chester and Rankin or Hall Beach or Fort Smith.

21 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Do you know if  
22 your parents attended to residential school?

23 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: I think  
24 my mom went to the day residential school. So my  
25 mom's Inuk and my dad is qallunaat. I don't think

1 my dad went to residential school.

2 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And can you tell  
3 me more about Jessica's childhood? Why wasn't she  
4 with her biological parents as well?

5 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Like,  
6 from my understanding in our culture, if a family  
7 member, an elder is wanting you to adopt her child,  
8 you just kind of go with it. That's like my  
9 understanding. I don't know if that's how it is.  
10 And so, I know that an uncle or something of my  
11 mom's wanted Marie to adopt Jess -- so my  
12 anaanatsiaq wanted my aunt to adopt us, and so, it  
13 was just kind of: If an elder said that, you just  
14 kind of went with it.

15 Sorry, your question was about her  
16 childhood? So, like, I know that my mom and my  
17 aunt were close back then, well, from what I could  
18 remember, and they did a lot of things, like, I  
19 remember my anaanatsiaq, when she was alive, would  
20 take me and Jess, and we would sleep there, and she  
21 would feed us and make us matching outfits. And  
22 then from there, it kind of becomes a blur, you  
23 know, being 3, 4. I think 4 years old is when I  
24 became reconnected with her again in Fort Smith  
25 with my mom.

1 MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, you said  
2 that she moved away to Winnipeg at 6 or 7 years old  
3 to your aunt's place and not too long after Jessica  
4 came to join you, and you said that she lived in an  
5 environment with abuse. Can you specify what kind  
6 of abuses? Was there any sexual abuse towards the  
7 children?

8 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: You  
9 know what's so funny, it's like we travelled the  
10 world throat singing with my aunt and the four of  
11 us, and we were well-known. We made albums, we  
12 made posters. Behind closed doors it was friggin'  
13 horrible, man. We would have to hold down one  
14 another sometimes so that my aunt can do stuff  
15 sexually, and that was funny, but it wasn't funny.

16 We had to have the house spic-and-  
17 span and if we missed a dust, man, you knew that  
18 you were going to get it. The extension cord was  
19 the worst because she would always use the end to  
20 make sure it hit the side of our ribs, and then we  
21 couldn't breathe every time she we would whip it at  
22 us, and she would go on and on and on, and she  
23 wouldn't stop until we stopped crying, and it was  
24 so hard not to cry or to scream, but in order for  
25 her to stop, we had to use all our friggin' might

1 and stop.

2 I remember Jessica ate one thing.

3 There was still four of those stupid fish things  
4 left and she ate one, and so Agatha went all crazy  
5 and she started beating the shit out of her like so  
6 hard, and I'll never forget her scream. She was  
7 even following her down the stairs with that stupid  
8 extension cord, and she was just screaming and she  
9 wouldn't stop. And the hangers, those friggin'  
10 wire hangers. I don't even allow them in my house  
11 anymore. I never allowed them in my house because  
12 they're ugly and they hurt. Holy cow, I never felt  
13 like that before in a long time.

14 And Jessica, honestly, she was the  
15 -- every time I tell my story in Winnipeg -- you  
16 know, because there's lots of Indigenous people  
17 that know how we are, lots of people that know who  
18 we are because of our singing. And you know what's  
19 funny, every single time I tell this story, they  
20 say, "We kind of knew something was wrong. We kind  
21 of knew she was abusive." And I'm talking about --  
22 like, some of them were social workers and justice  
23 officials, and they knew something was wrong, but  
24 nothing was ever done. We went years and years  
25 with all this abuse and no one said anything.



1 and the first thing I wanted to see was the nine-  
2 plex. They used to be red, but now they're green,  
3 and I wanted to see that door because there was  
4 some good memories there, you know, playing with  
5 her Cabbage Patch dolls and teasing each other with  
6 -- you know, we called it chocolate, but it was  
7 anak. I mean, it was just kid stuff, you know.

8                   And then we played with the  
9 lighter, and we accidentally got the carpet on  
10 fire, so we quickly, you know, lit it out, and we  
11 put a carpet that you put by the door on top of it,  
12 so our aunt or step-uncle couldn't see it, her  
13 stepdad, but when he found that, there was the belt  
14 and we were in the bedroom. But that's not all  
15 that happened in the bedroom.

16                   MS. FANNY WYLDE: When you ran  
17 away, I believe at 13 years old, that was from your  
18 aunt's place?

19                   MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Yup.

20                   MS. FANNY WYLDE: And after, you  
21 were put into a group home. Did anyone file a  
22 complaint?

23                   MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So,  
24 this is how it happened. I ran away first. That  
25 night, police found where I was. They picked me



1                                   We had the top child abuse  
2 investigator with the hospital. Charles Ferguson,  
3 I'll never forget him. He was awesome. He was so  
4 gentle but so real and hardcore. They took  
5 pictures of me and Jessica's body because we had  
6 whip marks everywhere and stab marks everywhere.

7                                   So, two investigators came to my  
8 foster's -- this was when we were living with my  
9 foster parents, Steve and Jackie Massey. They're  
10 the best things that ever happened to me. So, two  
11 investigators came there and we did our statements.

12 Mine was like 46 pages of everything that we could  
13 remember that happened to us while living with our  
14 aunt. And Jessica's, I think, was, like, going up  
15 a hundred because she got the worst. She got the  
16 worst of it than all of us.

17                                   We went to court. And, you know,  
18 like, you go to court and they don't name, you know  
19 -- because we were young and under CFS care at that  
20 time, so they don't name names, but people knew  
21 that it was us because I think one of the articles  
22 said something about us being Inuit or throat  
23 singers or something and it was, like, duh.

24                                   So we went to court for three or  
25 four days of being cross-examined. There's another

1 injustice. Jessica, you know, having to live the  
2 life that she lived from the time she was born till  
3 the time she was sitting on that stand going  
4 through all of this abuse and having to testify  
5 that this is indeed what she went through, and that  
6 lawyer -- I don't know. You call it the defence  
7 lawyer -- is grilling her on the stand telling her  
8 she's the liar, telling her that she's lying about  
9 everything, and that she's the one that did it,  
10 like, after everything that she went through and  
11 she had to feel that in court.

12 That's so disgusting. Who does  
13 that? I can't believe that defence lawyer was okay  
14 to do that to this young girl that went through all  
15 this shit. Sorry for my language. You know, like,  
16 that's so disgusting. That broke her, man. That  
17 really broke her. That's when her life went way  
18 down.

19 And the -- I mean, I work for  
20 justice, so I mean, I got to be careful with what I  
21 say here. For someone that did all those things,  
22 basically tortured us from the time we were 10 --  
23 for Jess, it was about 10. For me, it was about 7  
24 -- or 9, I mean, 9 for Jess till we were 13. Every  
25 single friggin' day, there was something that my



1 identity is so important.

2 MS. FANNY WYLDE: When you went to  
3 court, can I ask you what was the outcome of the  
4 court hearings?

5 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: It was  
6 awful.

7 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Was there any  
8 conviction?

9 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So,  
10 apparently if you go to church every Sunday and  
11 believe in the Lord and you use that, apparently  
12 that's good enough for you to get two years of  
13 probation with counselling. After all that hurt  
14 that we went through, that's all she had to face.  
15 Two years of probation and her condition was going  
16 to counselling once a week.

17 And she still managed to get two  
18 of the girls back. Leslie, the youngest one, and  
19 Jamie. Jamie was a baby when she moved in with  
20 Agatha, and today, she suffers from schizophrenia.  
21 You can't even have a decent conversation with her  
22 anymore. Leslie was so badly sexually abused I'm  
23 surprised she was okay to go back to Agatha, my  
24 aunt. Like, how does -- and she's still with her.  
25 And then, there's my cousin, Jessica, who fell

1 through every single cracks within every system  
2 possible.

3 I'm surprised I'm sitting here and  
4 that I have a university; I some university; I have  
5 a good job; I have a husband that loves me; and I  
6 have kids that have never been taken away by CFS.  
7 I always say this. I always say the strength that  
8 I have now more so since I've been 17 is because of  
9 Jess. She shows me something and does something  
10 for me to know that she is there for me and guiding  
11 me and helping me. I believe that 100 per cent.

12 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Can you describe  
13 the pictures to Commissioner Audette that's on the  
14 screen?

15 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So  
16 right now, the picture is of me and Jess. We were  
17 living with our foster parents together. That was  
18 the only time that we were together when we ran  
19 away from our aunt. And my foster dad, his dad is  
20 getting married, so we're singing "Amazing Grace"  
21 in Inuktitut at the wedding.

22 We're living with our foster  
23 parents again. Remembering just getting off the  
24 school bus after school. And I remember walking  
25 down that long driveway with her, just me and her,

1 and we're just talking about how cool it was to go  
2 to school and actually make friends because we  
3 weren't allowed that before. Probably planning  
4 some crazy, you know, how are we going to get in  
5 trouble next.

6 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Can you tell me  
7 more about Jessica's strengths and gifts?

8 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: She was  
9 so -- I mean, I talked about her beautiful voice.  
10 She had a voice of an angel. She really did, like,  
11 she had beautiful -- and she knew it. She'd sing  
12 all the time.

13 She was so artistic in every way  
14 possible, like, she could take, like, underwear and  
15 turn it into a bra somehow, like, she was so  
16 awesome that way, even, like -- she put a zipper on  
17 a bra, like, in the middle, and it was so cool  
18 because you didn't see that in the stores. You  
19 know, to me, it's like she invented that. She was  
20 so artistic and funny, and like -- but lost at the  
21 same time.

22 I remember one time, me and her --  
23 just giving you a little bit of a cute story, I  
24 guess. We were at the bedroom at our foster  
25 parents' place, and she was painting a chair blue,

1 and she was just always doing something artistic,  
2 and then, so she decided, "Hey, Nikki, take your  
3 clothes off, let me paint your body blue." She  
4 painted my whole body blue, and it was, like, late  
5 at night, we're getting ready for bed -- aren't we?  
6 We're supposed to be in bed, and our forest  
7 parents, "Go to bed." -- so I go to sneak into the  
8 bathroom to take the paint off and he shuts the  
9 water off. I had to go to bed with a blue body.  
10 It's like she knew that that was what was going to  
11 happen.

12 MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, when you  
13 arrived at your foster parents' house, can you --  
14 you described that you were receiving treatment?

15 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Well,  
16 no, like, so, when we were, like, she's the one  
17 that convinced me to move in with them because she  
18 was living with them first. I was just kind of on  
19 the streets living with friends and a few weeks  
20 later, she knew how to get -- she always knew how  
21 to get ahold of me. She got ahold of me and said,  
22 "You should really move here, like, it's so nice,  
23 and they don't hit you, and they don't yell at  
24 you."

25 And so, she convinced me enough



1                   So, it wasn't until after we left  
2 our foster home was when we -- I mean, I'm sure  
3 they tried with Jess, like I'm sure she tried going  
4 to see a therapist and trying to talk, but I'm sure  
5 she did, but I can be sure too that that would be  
6 so hard for her to deal with over again. And you  
7 couple that with, you know, trying to deal with all  
8 the crap that you went through from the time you  
9 were born and being in a home where you have no  
10 family, like, no family at all, and meeting the  
11 next kid that seems the coolest that's running away  
12 from the group home and showing you the life.  
13 That's fun, right, like, it's so easy for peer  
14 pressure.

15                   MS. FANNY WYLDE: You mentioned  
16 Jessica at one point was working from the streets  
17 and she had this man who was supplying her with  
18 drugs and taking care of her. Did she ever confide  
19 in you if he was ever abusive towards her?

20                   MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: I don't  
21 think she had to. I think you just kind of knew  
22 that he controlled her, like I'm just remembering  
23 how her demeanour was every time he was around  
24 compared to when he wasn't. Like, she was very  
25 relaxed when she was in my home because he wasn't

1 there. And she was able to talk about things,  
2 like, freely and openly, but then when he came  
3 around, it was like she was a robot almost, like it  
4 was just so -- like he controlled her and she knew  
5 that. She couldn't say anything or do anything  
6 around him.

7 I'm sure -- I mean, like I work --  
8 I don't know if I can say where I work, but I -- I  
9 work with high-risk criminals, and I see, you know,  
10 how some of these men treat the women that they're  
11 with, I mean, I went through abuse with -- I have  
12 three children with another man that was severely  
13 abusive, and my demeanour when I was around him  
14 matched the demeanour that she had when she was  
15 around him compared to not. Definitely.

16 MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, at one  
17 point, she ended up in a juvenile centre. Can you  
18 tell me about that?

19 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Like,  
20 multiple times, actually. You know, for having  
21 crack cocaine, possessing crack cocaine. I mean,  
22 then they were locking girls up that ran away from  
23 group homes for periods of times, you know, like,  
24 they knew that she was working the streets, so it  
25 was quite often she was in and out. I'm sure

1 there's some thefts under \$5,000 there, too.

2 But yeah, there's multiple times  
3 that she was in and out of the juvenile centre, but  
4 the last time, she somehow was able to run away  
5 from there and never went back, and then she was  
6 found, right, like --

7 MS. FANNY WYLDE: From when she  
8 ran away, how many months or weeks had passed  
9 before we found her?

10 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: You  
11 know what's funny, when my aunt can say the same  
12 thing. When you go through trauma and you go  
13 through, like, so much crap in your life, and I was  
14 in such a horrible part of my life, too, like days,  
15 weeks, months mean nothing. And you really can't  
16 keep track of that stuff. So it's so weird. So I  
17 can't say how long it was because I really don't  
18 know.

19 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And you had  
20 mentioned that a week prior to her death, she came  
21 to your house, and you made this plan, and the  
22 investigation concluded to a suicide. Did she ever  
23 mention anything about suicide?

24 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Never.  
25 Never, never, never. She would always call

1 someone, like -- especially my foster parents. She  
2 would always call them when she felt was in  
3 distress or sad or anything. Like, she wanted -- a  
4 week before they found her, she was making a plan  
5 with me to get out of that life. She wanted out.  
6 She didn't want to do that anymore. Who makes  
7 those plans and then a week later commits suicide,  
8 like, that doesn't make sense.

9 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And following  
10 the investigation, I believe that several years  
11 after, you tried to make contact with the RCMP.  
12 Can you tell us? Can you share with Commissioner  
13 about that?

14 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: So I  
15 think it was in 2014, I'm going to say. I was  
16 working for the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre  
17 in Winnipeg, and I somehow wanted to -- like, this  
18 is when I was like okay, I need the world to know  
19 that this wasn't a suicide, like, she didn't do  
20 this, so I contacted -- somehow, I was given the  
21 number to the RCMP D Division in Winnipeg, and I  
22 left a voice mail, and I said:

23 "I really would like you to  
24 look into this. This is her  
25 name. This is her date of

1 birth. I really don't think  
2 it was a suicide. Can you  
3 please look at her file and  
4 get back to me?"

5 It was 20 minutes, 40 minutes  
6 maybe, but I know it was within the hour, a  
7 detective called me from D Division and said this  
8 to me. He said:

9 "I looked over her file and  
10 from what I'm reading, it was  
11 deemed a suicide. Now, I'm  
12 not saying there were bad  
13 people in her life and bad  
14 people that could have done  
15 anything to her, but the  
16 person that was in question  
17 has since died six years ago,  
18 so we know that he's never  
19 going to hurt another child  
20 or girl ever again."

21 Those were his words to me.  
22 That's disgusting, like, who says that? That's  
23 saying, Well, it looks like it could have a murder,  
24 and it looks like there was someone that was being  
25 questioned, and it looks like, you know, he may

Nikki Komaksiutiksak, In relation to her cousin  
Jessica Michaels

1 have had something to do it, but you know what, he  
2 died six years ago, so he's not going to hurt  
3 anyone else. So who cares really. If she died by  
4 suicide or if she was murdered. That's so gross.

5 MS. FANNY WYLDE: She was found  
6 August 26th in 2009, right?

7 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: 2001.

8 MS. FANNY WYLDE: 2001. And you  
9 called the RCMP in 2014.

10 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: About  
11 there.

12 MS. FANNY WYLDE: And was it  
13 information that the man that was questioned had  
14 died six years prior.

15 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Yes.

16 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you.

17 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Jessica  
18 was 17 when she passed. The guy was 43 years old.  
19 43-year-old Vietnamese man. And I've heard of,  
20 like -- when I was younger, I knew that it was,  
21 like, on this street you hear that the Vietnamese  
22 gang kind of -- they held the pocket of prostitutes  
23 in and around Winnipeg. So that's -- like, just  
24 hearing that and knowing that you were, like --  
25 they're bad people that took advantage of a young

1 girl.

2 MS. FANNY WYLDE: She was missing  
3 from juvenile centre as you mentioned. Do you have  
4 any information -- did they ever try to find her?  
5 Well, were they, like, research to find her?

6 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Like, I  
7 think they called my foster parents to say, "Have  
8 you heard from Jess?" And, like -- they would say  
9 yes, like, we've heard from her, she's okay, she's  
10 alive, blah, blah, blah. And so, I know that there  
11 was several times when my foster parents would  
12 actually pick her up, bring her home, feed her,  
13 clothe her, give her some money, and then she'd  
14 take off again.

15 Now, when CFS got ahold of that  
16 information, they actually told my foster parents  
17 that they would take their licence away if they did  
18 that again, if they went to go pick her up if she  
19 was in need. That they would take their licence  
20 away because they're not giving her up to the  
21 authorities to go back to juvenile centre.

22 So there were a lot of times they  
23 actually did it discreetly, without letting anyone  
24 know that they were doing that because -- like, cut  
25 everything off from this girl? Like, these systems

1 that are in place are supposed to be there to  
2 protect families and children, and they're really  
3 damaging and making, you know, these  
4 recommendations for children and mothers and  
5 fathers to do this or that, meanwhile, it's pushing  
6 the families away even more.

7 MS. FANNY WYLDE: I believe your  
8 foster parents somehow managed to bring her back  
9 home. So, she was buried here in Nunavut?

10 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: In  
11 Chester. So, when Jessica passed away, we had a  
12 funeral for her in Winnipeg, but there was also a  
13 funeral here in Chester and because no one wanted  
14 to pay for -- what would they call it, the freight?  
15 -- to have her remains brought back home. No one  
16 wanted to pay that. No one in Manitoba and no one  
17 in Nunavut, so my foster parents --

18 They were going to sell their  
19 house to help bring her body back home where she  
20 belonged even though they had a family of their  
21 own. And just knowing some people, we were able to  
22 go on CJOB69 -- I think it was -- in Winnipeg and  
23 talk about the injustice of Jessica from the time  
24 she was born to even after her death. So they put  
25 out donations all across Manitoba and Winnipeg, and

1 we were able to raise enough money to bring her  
2 body back to Chester, where they had another --

3                               There's her grave. My uncle took  
4 that picture for me a couple years ago because I  
5 haven't been in Chester since I was probably four  
6 years old, like 30 years, so he took that picture  
7 for me in 2012. Whatever the mitts say, so I knew.  
8 Took that picture for me so that I could have it.

9                               MS. FANNY WYLDE: How did the  
10 death of Jessica impact you, impacted your life and  
11 your family.

12                              MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Well, I  
13 went from having at least someone to having no one  
14 family-wise. We really -- like from the time she  
15 passed away until now, actually, I always felt like  
16 we didn't have a voice in terms of her murder. It  
17 wasn't until six years ago that I started getting  
18 to know who our family is here in Nunavut and even  
19 then, I've met, like, a handful of them. I hear I  
20 have hundreds of family members, you know, and I  
21 have no idea who they are.

22                              She's given me the strength to  
23 move forward in life and to have some healing in  
24 some ways, but I think this, like, now gives her a  
25 voice for me to speak so that crap like this

1 doesn't happen to any other girl in her situation  
2 ever again. There's a lot of work to be done for  
3 that to happen, but I believe that telling her  
4 story is enough to come up with a lot of  
5 recommendations in every area of every -- yeah.

6 MS. FANNY WYLDE: If I may ask  
7 you, what kept you going all these years because  
8 there's Jessica's story, but there's your own story  
9 as a survivor as well. What kept you from going on  
10 the same road as Jessica?

11 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: What  
12 kept me -- sorry, say that again.

13 MS. FANNY WYLDE: What kept you  
14 going from the same road as Jessica, like, Jessica  
15 was working from the streets and --

16 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: That's  
17 such a hard question to answer. I mean, I can say  
18 somewhere deep down in my heart that I knew  
19 everything that -- every kind of abuse and  
20 injustice that I ever went through, I knew that it  
21 was wrong, and somehow, I had the courage not to  
22 fall through, you know, drugs and alcohol, but I  
23 give, like, a lot of the strength for me to move on  
24 and carry on. I mean, I had no family when I was  
25 13 because I was in different group homes with

1 different strangers in my life everyday. And I  
2 really wanted a family, so I made my own family.

3                   At 15, I became a mom. At 16, I  
4 had my own apartment. I mean, apparently, I was  
5 the first in Canada for CFS to allow a young child  
6 to have their own place because I was mature enough  
7 to take care of my child, and my children are the  
8 ones that kept me going even though the three  
9 children that I had with -- my three oldest  
10 children, their dad. I mean, I was in a  
11 relationship with him for seven years from when I  
12 was like 14 and a half to -- I was 21, and my aunt  
13 was a horrible abuser. He was just a different  
14 kind of abuser.

15                   MS. FANNY WYLDE: I don't think I  
16 have any more questions, Nikki. I want to leave  
17 you the space to make recommendations or  
18 observations to Commissioner Audette, and after, I  
19 will leave her this space to ask you questions as  
20 well.

21                   MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Where  
22 do I start? Like, I 100 per cent believe that it's  
23 so detrimental for any child to be taken away from  
24 their family, from their identity and from who --  
25 where they're from. That takes away from their

1 identity. The child welfare system really needs to  
2 find a way to work with family and not against.

3 CFS workers need to be trained. I  
4 mean, I know you go to school for four years and  
5 textbook this and textbook that, and, yes, you have  
6 your field practicum, but there's got to be some  
7 sort of screening for some of these social workers  
8 that go and think they can police families. Being  
9 a social worker isn't about policing them. It's  
10 about supporting them and guiding them and working  
11 with them.

12 I can't think now. I said so  
13 much. I know I have -- I've been talking with my  
14 husband. My husband is the best support that I  
15 have in my life. He's been there for me. We got  
16 married six years ago, and we have a beautiful  
17 child here with us today, too. Hi Brandon. And,  
18 you know, like a lot of this strength that I have  
19 to be able to sit here and do this comes from my  
20 husband because he teaches me not to be quiet.  
21 He's a teacher, so he likes to talk, and so,  
22 therefore, I've learned how to talk. He talks a  
23 lot. Just kidding.

24 So -- I mean, I've said so many  
25 things, but I really -- when you take away a

1 child's ability to be with their family and know  
2 who their family is, it takes away from their  
3 identity, and it takes away from what a family is.

4 I mean, your life is revolved around family.  
5 You're born with family and to be taken away and  
6 not be given the chance, like that -- so horrible.

7 I think that's so important. I'm sure I can go on  
8 and on and on, like, I'm foggy with my thinking.

9 MS. FANNY WYLDE: Commissioner  
10 Audette, if you have any questions or comments for  
11 the witness.

12 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:  
13 Merci beaucoup, Maître Wylde -- not really because  
14 Maître Wylde a very narrow or quite the question  
15 that I had about the system or how it went and even  
16 what make you stay away of, you know, being  
17 suicidal, I guess, or going to drive --

18 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: I was  
19 suicidal, and I did --

20 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: But  
21 you're still alive.

22 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Right.  
23 But I had my struggles too, you know. Even to  
24 this day, I still have struggles. Do you know if -  
25 - yeah, I have a lot of struggles.

1 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: But  
2 you're here.

3 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: But I'm  
4 here. I don't know. I don't know why. I don't  
5 know how. I can't answer that. Like, it's -- I  
6 just do it because I need to.

7 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:  
8 Maybe there's no answer but just - savourer, en  
9 anglais, comment on dit? Maybe it's just a question  
10 of enjoying life, and you're a mother of five  
11 children, and one is here, so. I always say --  
12 because few weeks ago in Quebec, it was the week of  
13 promoting life. The suicidal week awareness, and  
14 my girls says things about that, and I say, "You  
15 know, we have to do a contract for life." And I  
16 think you did one without knowing maybe, but you're  
17 an inspiration for us, and it was -- as you can  
18 tell, English is my second language.

19 I visualize every word you say  
20 like it was there for me. I feel more. I could  
21 hear the noise or even the smell of the kitchen or  
22 -- you brought me to your world. I didn't like it.  
23 Not your world, but the pain that you went  
24 through, and the tears, I have tears of anger, and  
25 quickly, I had to, with the strength of my

1 grandmother, remind that we have to honour you,  
2 honour you and your cousin.

3 I was able to learn a bit about  
4 your cousin earlier this morning and blessed to be  
5 the one receiving your truth. But also, I feel  
6 that we are very, very responsible because there  
7 will be another phase within this great journey of  
8 the National Inquiry where we sit down with the  
9 institutions, where we sit down with people who  
10 went through trauma. Some will say expert panel,  
11 but me, I'm very honest, the expert are the  
12 families, are the survivors. That's for me, an  
13 expert.

14 And everywhere we went, across  
15 Canada, we've heard one or too many stories and  
16 truth like yours, you and your cousin. So for me,  
17 it's unacceptable, and if this inquiry can push  
18 change or force that change that needs to happen  
19 for our children and the system of child welfare  
20 system, the justice system, to -- you see that,  
21 right? It's there to support and to protect us and  
22 also the families.

23 So, I hope Canada heard that. I  
24 hope Nunavut government heard that. I hope the  
25 other provinces and territories heard your message.

1 We cannot deny that it doesn't exist, that people  
2 are falling in cracks or the system is failing and  
3 let -- because of your testimony, and how very  
4 powerful, there's an obligation for all of us that  
5 we have to change, even the Indigenous government.

6 How we do things.

7 There's two moments you made me  
8 think again and again because everywhere we go --  
9 about the sentence, you talk about how she was  
10 sentences -- how do we say in English, the guy --  
11 it was just two years of being good and make sure  
12 you don't repeat, but for you, did you think it was  
13 a fair sentence?

14 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK:  
15 Absolutely not. And in fact, the investigators  
16 that investigated -- that were part of this  
17 investigation, they were going to repeal the  
18 judge's decision. Whatever became of that, I don't  
19 have no idea. I was already, you know --

20 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: And  
21 the other question I have is: You strongly believe  
22 that it's not a suicide? Did you make other step  
23 that it goes further or --

24 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: Like  
25 legally or with institution or whatever, I mean, I

1 tried with division, you know, the D Division RCMP  
2 in Winnipeg. That didn't help, and so, I kind of  
3 just, like, lost hope, and, you know, looking into  
4 it further, I mean -- so one of the things that I  
5 actually do every year in Winnipeg at the  
6 legislative building, they have what they call a  
7 "butterfly ceremony," and I sing at that every year  
8 to honour Jess, and it's really funny that the  
9 first year that I went to go sing at this, I was  
10 standing there, and it was cold, and --

11 As you guys are aware, Jessica was  
12 adopted to my Aunt Marie here -- so I'm standing  
13 there, standing there, and then -- I'm there to  
14 honour my sister, Jess -- I called her my sis --  
15 and all of a sudden, out of nowhere -- this was a  
16 sign. This was definitely a sign because -- while  
17 I was standing there, her biological sister had  
18 been walking to The Forks, no idea that this  
19 ceremony was even happening and kind of just walked  
20 into the crowd and there she was, just before I was  
21 about to go up to sing for Jessica. That was a  
22 sign from Jess saying I'm here, and I know that was  
23 her biological sister that came.

24 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:  
25 C'est beau -- sing and sing.

Nikki Komaksiutiksak, In relation to her cousin  
Jessica Michaels

1 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: I  
2 taught my daughters, so -- yeah, I started again  
3 when I was 19, and I haven't stopped since. I  
4 won't be stopping any time soon.

5 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:  
6 Merci. Jason, would you like to say something or  
7 is there anything you like to talk?

8 MR. JASON VANDENBRINK: Another  
9 time.

10 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:  
11 If I can say to your husband, it's  
12 beautiful to see that men are walking beside us,  
13 the women.

14 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK: There  
15 are good men out there, and I've definitely been  
16 blessed to find a man that respects me and supports  
17 me and is there for me, loves me and my children,  
18 and -- you're awesome. I love you so much.

19 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:  
20 Well, we're supposed to give you a gift and we want  
21 to do it if you accept. But before I pass the mic  
22 to my grandmother, I want to say you gave us a gift  
23 for all of us, but for me, I'll say you gave me a  
24 gift that we didn't choose that. We are in that  
25 situation, but there's a moment in our life that we

1 are breaking that circle or cycle and you're good  
2 example that, yes, we can stop it and give a better  
3 life to our children. Thank you. Because we need  
4 role model like that. We need example like you, we  
5 need to prove that we are strong, we are beautiful,  
6 we are amazing and weak and cry, but we can say  
7 that we're creating a new chapter, and for me, it's  
8 a gift. Merci beaucoup.

9 MS. NIKKI KOMAKSIUTIKSAK:  
10 Quyanainni.

11 MS. BERNIE WILLIAMS: -- say howa  
12 (ph) to you, Nikki, for sharing your journey with  
13 us, and as painful it is, thank you for sharing  
14 about Jess and to your aunt.

15 As I explain about -- the eagle  
16 feathers have come -- started their journey from my  
17 home in Haida Gwaii. These eagle feathers have  
18 made several stops, some family members donating  
19 them all across Canada and these have been donated  
20 by the Sechelt First Nations band in between them,  
21 Vancouver Island, Vancouver at the Sunshine Coast,  
22 and I'd like to offer this gift to you.

23 There is some tea -- what do you  
24 call those -- hats? Cozies? Tea pads? You're not  
25 supposed to say that. That's supposed to be our

1 secret. There's some Labrador tea there and some  
2 Arctic cotton.

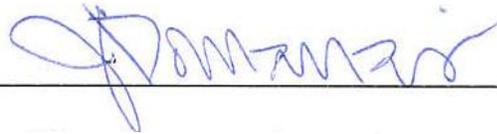
3 COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:  
4 Avant de terminer, Maître Wylde; we'd like to ask  
5 Michelle if she would give it to you. I need your  
6 strength, and I need a hug also. It was a tough,  
7 tough session. A beautiful but tough. Merci.

8 MS. FANNY WYLDE: I would like to  
9 ask for this session to be adjourned. Thank you.  
10 --- Exhibits (code: P0191190102)

11 Exhibit 1: Folder containing  
12 three digital images  
13 displayed during the public  
14 testimony of Nikki  
15 Komasksiutiksak

16 --- Whereupon the adjourning at 2:27 p.m.

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I have, to the best  
of my skill and ability,  
accurately transcribed from a pre-existing  
recording  
the foregoing proceeding.



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Jovelle Domanais, Court Reporter