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
Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel
Elmbridge Room
Metro Vancouver, British Columbia

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Public Volume 108
Linda Leforte & Seth Leforte,
In relation to Melissa Nicholson

Heard by Chief Commissioner Marion Buller
Commission Counsel: Meredith Porter

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Heiltsuk First Nation	No Appearance
Northwest Indigenous Council Society	No Appearance
Our Place – Ray Cam Co-operative Centre	No Appearance
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada	No Appearance
Vancouver Sex Workers' Rights Collective	No Appearance
Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak / Women of the Métis Nation	No Appearance

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Metro Vancouver, British Columbia

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MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Good afternoon, Chief Commission Buller. I'm sitting here with Seth Leforte and Linda Leforte and they've come here today to speak about Melissa Nicholson. Melissa was Seth's sister and she was murdered when she was 17 years old.

Prior to their giving their -- telling their story here today, I'm going to request that they be promised in.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: Would you like an eagle feather for your promise or not?

MR. SETH LEFORTE: I -- I guess so or we can exchange tobacco.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Okay. Seth, do you promise to tell your truth in a good way this afternoon?

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Yes.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Thank you. Ms. Leforte, do you promise to tell your truth in a good way this afternoon?

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: Yes, I do.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Thank you. Go ahead.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Thank you. Okay, Seth.

Well, I'm going to ask, then, if you could start by telling us a little bit about Melissa.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Okay. I can't tell you that much because I was -- I was really small when I -- the last time I seen her. My sister was born about four years before me. She was born in 19 -- was she born in 1974?

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: Three.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: 1973.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: I could tell you, Seth.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: My mom can tell. It's more than I can.

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: Melissa -- I met Melissa when she was 3 years old, shortly after meeting her dad. She -- they had separated, her mother and father, and Melissa became -- like visiting regularly with us. She was just a sweet -- like sunshine. She had -- her mother had like very dark black hair, but she had hair more the colour of her dad's. It was like -- you know, I always used to say it was like honey. I would braid her hair and the different colours of blonde and brown and just sweet. And she had a big smile. Like she had large teeth, but when she smiled all of -- and her teeth showed and it was like her whole face would light up. She was just a sweet, adorable little girl.

She -- well, I would say there was some problematic things going on all the time between her mother and her dad, who was living with me. There had been custody issues and a variety of things, but we reached a kind of an understanding where she would spend time with us and then spend time with her -- with her mother.

The last time I would have seen her, we were living in Nelson, BC and she would come every Christmas because her birthday was, I believe, the 19th of December. She used to come and spend the whole Christmas time with us and visit and I believe that was the last time I saw her because the following January, we decided to move to -- back to Ontario and it wasn't long after that that her father and I split up, so he was in Toronto and I was back on territory where my family's from in Tyendinaga.

My memories of her, obviously, are from a long time ago, just lots of really sweet memories.

Shortly after her father and I separated, I had moved. We had been in London, Ontario and I moved home, where my mother lived, and was on unemployment with Seth and his younger sister and I got a call from the Social Services Department in Victoria. They had Melissa in their office and they expressed that she was having lots of difficulties staying in school and staying at home. She was running away. And she had wondered if she could come

and live with me and, regrettably, I said no because I wasn't working; that I was just getting re-established and I had two little kids of my own. And I spoke to her and she said she was going to try to stay home and go back to school and do what she was supposed to do. But anyways, that was my last conversation with her and I can't even tell you exactly when that was.

But the day that I received the call that she had been murdered, it was actually my birthday in June 1991 and within the same day or so after, I also received a call that my grandfather had died in Timmins, so I kind of -- everything was just kind of on hold. I flew to my grandfather's funeral. I wasn't able to participate in anything that was happening with Melissa and it's like I shut that piece down until about eight years ago.

There was a group walking from BC to Ottawa and they stopped -- the Walkers for Justice, they stopped in Tyendinaga. And I'm a counsellor there in social work and they came and met in one our buildings and I remember it was as if I had just got the news again. I was angry. I was really probably quite obnoxious to people, but I got a chance to talk and I got the chance to talk about my feelings and the loss of her and I learned a little bit more about what had really happened with her.

And then I joined a group; Sisters in Spirit

is an awesome group of women and men that get together regularly, plan events to remind everyone about the murdered and missing women and I found that was really helpful for me. Like the first few times, it was very hard for me to talk about it; particularly, my feeling of guilt, of what could have been if I would have said yes.

And then eventually, you know, I began to think about how could things have been different and it just gets me thinking about so much of how our people, in general, fall through the cracks of services. Like, in my mind, knowing that she was involved with a social services program in Victoria made it okay for me to say, "No, this isn't a good time. I'm not working". But, you know, that was a false belief that maybe there was supports for her. Maybe there wasn't the right kind of supports for her.

So I guess I'm left with -- you know, it's been 27 years; I'm left with thinking about how can we prevent this. We're not going to bring Melissa back, but how can we prevent these things from happening to other kids, to other women, to other men for that matter?

Like it seems to me like we have a lot of social programs and I'm involved with social work things all the time. I'm the manager of a shelter in our community for women, but we're not -- to me, we're not doing enough. The systems that exist aren't really meeting

the need and I don't know that I really have an answer as to how to make it better other than letting us develop our own ways of doing things, right. And taking kids away and placing them in other homes is not the answer. Helping to support families that maybe could do a better job if they had money, just so many things like that that I think about socially.

Anyways, it doesn't -- it doesn't take away the loss talking about it, but it's comforting to know that somebody's paying attention maybe. I don't know. To be honest with you, I'm not really hopeful. I'm not really -- I shouldn't say hopeful, but I will believe when the time comes. If something changes, that will be awesome. But I guess for me, it's like I really hope that this inquiry really does end up with some recommendations that are doable and that they are acted upon.

And, you know, I felt somewhat like well, Melissa's gone; let her go. We do a ceremony to let people leave. You know, you do the feast and send them on their way. But there's all the other people, like her mother and father both died, you know, broken hearted that their daughter was murdered with no answers, right, no reasons behind it all. So I guess there has to be something that we're can do differently to ensure that other people don't suffer through things for 27 years and don't know what's

really gone on. I guess that's my ultimate thought about it.

And the services that exist, what are we doing to change them, including police services? What are we doing to change that lack of -- I don't know, missing the pieces, right?

I think -- and the other thing was -- one of the most disturbing things that I never read until about eight years ago was a newspaper clipping about Melissa's murder and it -- she was described as a 17-year-old prostitute that was found. And I'm thinking, "Why in the world does the media do that? How is it they're allowed to do that?" She was a beautiful, young woman. Whatever she was or wasn't doing, to me, is irrelevant. She's a human being and I'm not quite certain what the reasoning behind that is, but I guess that's another typical thing that, you know, I've read in lots of other reports of women that have been found is that there's another stigma attached to that. It's not just that they're a woman, but there's something else to it that, perhaps, feeds into them not being worthwhile. I don't really know, but it has a -- definitely has a negative connotation.

I don't really know that I have anything else that I wanted to share. It certainly would be awesome to have closure, to know what really did happen to Melissa

and to really come to some kind of conclusion as to whether or not something will be further done or are we just looking at some kind of social changes, which I think are the most important, truly, at this point in time. Anyways, I think that's about all I have to share.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: I was all just ready to just go here 10 minutes ago. Then, all of a sudden, I'm like, "Ah, I don't know what to say". I think I want to put a little bit of the context as to how we got here because it's a little bit funny. Well, not funny in a humorous way, more like odd.

But maybe six months ago, I got contacted by a woman who was my -- partner of my father when I was a kid. After my mom and dad split up, my dad -- he got together with this other woman and I hadn't seen her in a long time; probably some 20 years. And she contacted me and asked me if I had any interest in speaking with the RCMP regarding my sister Melissa's murder and I said, "Yes".

And so, very quickly, it got organized and I think we had a meeting or two and then they flew the officers from Victoria to Toronto and my younger sister, who chose not to come this week -- weekend, we went and met with the RCMP and we had some very specific questions for them regarding our sister's murder.

So I'd like to create a little bit of context. When my sister was murdered, I was like about 14 years old. She was 17. She was murdered in 1991 in June -- June 9th; at least that's when we got the call. And prior to that, we all lived together here in British Columbia; my mom and dad and my younger sister and myself and my older sister and Melissa and two older brothers, all -- for a whole series of reasons, our family ended up kind of getting dispersed all in different directions.

It really started with my father. So my father and his little siblings were left in a hotel room when he was like five years old, seven years old; I believe somewhere in British Columbia. And after a couple of days of stealing food and bringing it back to feed his siblings -- younger siblings, the social services, at the time, -- you know, somebody must of called and so they gather these little kids up and they all got separated and they were all adopted out to other families and so my father was adopted out to a family in Seattle. And so I believe that my sister's murder is associated because it's a systemic problem in the system.

So my dad never -- he never really understood how to be a part of a family. You know, there was something that was broken there and he didn't know who he -- he didn't know who his parents were. He didn't know

who his -- he had some recollections of his mom, but he -- there wasn't enough memories there and, you know, his name got changed and all those sorts of things. And so he knew that he had been born and was -- lived in British Columbia, so he returned searching for her and that was what ended up with him, you know, having a child with Melissa's mom and ended up meeting my mom here and so on and so forth. It's a legacy of that -- of the system taking kids and separating them and not having a connection to family and not having the community supports and the like integrity to maintain social connections perpetuated. It began much before Melissa came along, so ---

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: Genevieve was the same by the way.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Genevieve was the same, yeah, ---

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: Melissa's mother.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: --- Melissa's mom. She was Cree and she was taken from her family and adopted out and then -- and so they had -- these two find each other, right, and they had my sister and then they struggled with taking care of her. And then my mom came along and now there was three of them having -- struggling to take care of and then the rest of us and so on.

And so, for me, as a little person, I -- you

know, I've got a handful of memories. We left British Columbia when I was, I think, like six or seven years old. And I have -- you know, I have memories of Christmas and I have memories of, you know, playing with toys and I have a tea set and, you know, that sort of stuff; the silly things, and I had a bedroom downstairs in the house.

And I remember our -- her and I's last conversation together and it must have been -- we were getting ready -- she must have been ready to go back to her mother's maybe; I'm not sure. But I knew that we were -- we knew that we were parting ways because I asked her if even though we were moving or what; I'm not sure, that -- or if she would still be my big sister and if she'd still love me.

I mean I'm nearly 40 years old and I'm still hurting because I miss my sister. So I can just imagine the pain that my mom and my dad and Genevieve and my brothers all experienced in this loss and perpetual losses.

So we ended up moving back to Ontario. And then Melissa and I have an older brother and Melissa and Shawn are closer in age and Shawn moved back to British Columbia to be near here and so those two were here by themselves. And my brother got him -- my brother got himself in trouble too, somehow, and he ended up in jail at the time when my sister was murdered.

And so on the day that my sister was murdered, we got the news. It was my mother's birthday and I found out when we met with the RCMP, my brother had called a whole bunch of times that day. It was still really bothering him, right. He was hoping that we were going to know what was happening. He had -- he knew that we were having this meeting to meet with the RCMP and that I promised him that we would come out to British Columbia and we'd come and put a headstone out for her.

So he was like determined to do something and he signed himself up to go to rehab and so he was all ready to go to rehab and he had cleaned himself up for a month. And the day that I spoke with the RCMP, I guess back in February, the next morning he was getting on a bus to go to the treatment centre and he called 60 times that day; literally, between my phone and my sister's phone, and he wanted to know all the details. He wanted to know about what they knew, what the RCMP had, you know, to share with us.

And we were supposed to be meeting and find out from the coroner's report and get all that information because when my sister got murdered, we weren't told anything. There was very little information that was actually shared with our family about her murder. They said it was an open case -- open investigation and they

couldn't share anything.

Well, my sister's case is still an open investigation 27 years later and they still haven't shared with us any details about her murder. The only information that we have is that which was printed in the newspaper reports, which -- I mean that's silly to think that newspapers actually give you any information, right. It's just tabloids -- just tabloids. It's not evidence. It's not knowledge. And the other little bits of information is the little tidbits of stuff that we knew as family members and as -- right.

So we know that she called home that night and said, you know, "Don't lock the door. I'll be home and I'm going out. I'll see you tomorrow and I love you" and -- to her mother and then the next day or the day after, they found her dead on the side of the road naked.

And we don't actually know how she died and one of the newspaper reports says her body was bruised. So my dad always assumed that she was beaten, but we don't know that actually. And I asked the RCMP and they wouldn't tell me.

So anyways, back to the meeting. All this is important because it'll give you some context. So when we had the meeting with the RCMP, I -- we asked lots of questions. We asked how she died. We asked if she had

been on drugs. We asked how they knew -- whether they even had evidence that she was a prostitute or not like because we had some -- just some newspaper reports.

And the officer, at first, was like a little bit standoffish. I insisted to record the meeting and they were uncomfortable about that and the fact that they were uncomfortable, that made me more suspicious of who they were.

And they didn't tell us anything that wasn't in the newspaper reports that they brought. They brought a stack of 20 pages and -- and the only information that we had -- they basically told us a story that he picked and choosed out of the newspaper reports. I'm not even kidding; that's what happened.

Afterward, my sister and I went through the stack of papers and, literally, every detail that the police officer gave us was from that newspaper clippings. There was a few pieces of details of information outside of that, but not much and not stuff that was necessarily relevant to us; it was more about patting themselves on the back about how many boxes of evidence they had and, you know, how much time and money they spent on her case. But they didn't tell me any details about her and they didn't know about -- about us, right.

And so I'm not really trying to complain

about them; that's not the issue. The issue is that our family hasn't been given any knowledge. And I -- so at one point, I said to my sister, I said, "Why don't we just ask them to close the case then, so that at least we can know, right?" I mean it's been 27 years".

And the -- that Colton boy had -- that case had just happened a week earlier. There had been an announcement with the court and, you know, that rancher shot that kid in the head and the courts let him out -- let him free, you know. And -- and then Trudeau, the prime minister, interferes in the court case because, of course, he knows that it's totally a disaster and he just made it worse, but that had just happened.

So I -- I said to that police officer -- I'm like, "We'd like to know if you can close the case because we would like this information. And you're saying the reason you can't tell us is because it's an open case and it might -- we might share information that could spoil the evidence or spoil the, you know, catching the person who did it, so why don't we close it and then we can know?"

And the officer was -- he was kind of upset with me. He said, "We've never had anybody ask that before." And -- and well, we said, "Well" -- I said to him -- he was a little bit mad at me. I said, "Well, it's not like if you catch him you're going to do anything about it

anyways. You're going to take him to court and they'll let him go, right. That's what you guys do unless it's an Indian who did it and then you'll lock him up forever, ever, ever." But that's what I believe. I -- I've seen that over and over in this country and that's what happens.

So of course he said that wasn't a possibility. In fact, they told us that the only way they close the case is if they find the person who did it. If not, then the case stays open forever, which means that our family is never given any information. Our community is never given any information. My mother -- it's very likely that my mom is going to go without knowing what happened to my sister, along with my dad and Genevieve, Melissa's mom, and that's wrong.

So I'm nearly 40 years old. I'm twice as old as my sister was when she died, right. I'm twice her age. And my -- I've got an 18-year-old-daughter. She came with us today. She jumped on the plane and came all the way here and it was too upsetting for her to come and sit here, right. So that's her aunty we're talking about and so she couldn't come down from the room and come and sit because she was going to cry too hard, she said. You know, I don't think she wanted her tears on TV maybe. I don't know.

But I guess my point in saying that is that

I recognize that emotionally this is still affecting our family and not having that closure is continuing to perpetuate that pain and suffering. So it's not just the pain and suffering of someone who killed my sister, but the system is set up and designed to suit itself and not provide supports and protections for the family. And so whether it's the justice system or the policing system or even the family -- the family supports or the CAS, you know, we'll look all the way back, historically, to my father or to my sister, you know, it's the same sorts of problems.

And I've got a daughter that's almost the same age that my sister was murdered, you know, and a couple of months difference and I asked her to come with me because I wanted her to understand. I guess I hoped that if she came she could have some healing and have some understanding about why her dad is the way he is; why I don't trust the police, why I don't believe that CAS is our friend or here to help us or going to protect families you know. I earnestly don't believe that. My mom works in the field and I -- her and I've had lots of discussions about that, as well, because I don't see that as actually helping us.

So when I called my brother that night -- I came back from a meeting with the RCMP and I told him that

they didn't tell us anything new that we didn't already know -- he was kind of like -- I could tell he sounded disappointed and he said, "Well, I guess, you know, that's how it is, yeah". And he said, "Well, I'm off to rehab tomorrow."

I heard from his son about a week ago. My brother's back in prison. And the thing I didn't know about that night was that my brother was -- had been -- he -- he's close to -- so he would have been like 19-20 years old when my sister got murdered. He had just kind of got thrown in jail himself. He got himself in trouble.

Well, my sister was murdered on my mom's birthday and then they brought my brother from prison to my sister's funeral on his birthday and so my brother never, ever celebrated a birthday again.

And to me, I believe that there's some parts about the system that have zero sensitivity. It doesn't even have the capacity to pay attention to not allow those things to happen; to be like, let's put -- we'll put this funeral off a day, right. Let's not bury this child on her sibling's birthday. You know, like there has to be some compassion. There has to be a different way to do this.

So my -- it was interesting when we had this meeting with the RCMP because my younger sister was with us and my younger sister and I share the same father and we

share the same mom and so Melissa was her sister too and she never remembered her, right. She was too small. She was too young when Melissa died and no memories.

And she said to the RCMP, she said, "My sister's death and all of the fallout, the way my father was treated -- they told my -- the RCMP told my father that there wasn't -- there was -- they're going to do their hard -- hardest to find who did it, but he needed to be understanding that these sorts of things happen to girls in that -- and that women in that line of work."

That's the attitude of the cops in this area -- in this place, right, at that time. That it was like, she was a prostitute so, you know, they get killed. I'm sorry. I don't care what you exchange your services for, that doesn't give someone else the right to kill you. And there wasn't even any evidence or proof that was what she was doing that day. It was just an excuse to not pursue it, I believe. And so I think that's part of the reason why we got the big, long song and dance about how many hours of time they spent and how many millions of dollars would have had to have been spent.

And they kept reopening the case. My sister's case was opened in June, of course, of 1991 and they had manhunts and whatever and combing the area from then until November of that year or October, so like six

months, and then they closed it. And the police made it a big deal to us that they investigated that long. I mean acted like it was a big deal. So the fact that he acted like that was a big deal, it means that all these other families who the police, you know, looked for two weeks, this is -- that's a problem. Six months is not a big deal. I've lost wallets for longer periods of time than that you know. "Oh, there it is. See, it's in the truck, right." That's the truth.

So they reopened the case in 1995 and didn't contact any family members to tell them they reopened the case. And then they reopened the case again in 2003 and then they reopened the case again in 2006 or 2008 and if they found new evidence and they still didn't contact any of us. And then in 2014, they started trying to reach out to the only -- Genevieve's boy -- what was his name? She had been consistent with the same one.

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: Yeah, it jumps out of my mind now.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: I can't remember his name. Anyways, her partner. They weren't married, but they had been together all that time. And they tried to reach out to him.

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: His name was Guy.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Yeah, Guy.

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: Guy.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Guy, yeah. And it was related to the case, but not really.

I asked the police officer, "So how many suspects have you got?" He says -- I said, "How did you figure that -- how did you, you know, what -- what's the story? What's the plan? What's the?" "Well, I can't really tell you anything." They -- we couldn't even get a what's your theory, right. We didn't even know what their theory was. All he said was, "At one point, we thought we might have been dealing with a serial killer, but that got ended." And they thought that some of the -- that her death was -- may have been related to -- connected to some other deaths of other women, but they found those women's remains at the Pickton farm or related to that guy, but that my sister was separate, different.

So they got no theory. They got no -- they -- not that they would share anyways. And I said, "Well, how did you" -- they said they were -- had it narrowed down to six people. And I said, "Well, how did you do that?" They said, "Well, we started with 360 people that we thought were the most likely to have done it in the province and then we narrowed that down to 193 and then we selected the most likely 12 out of that and of that 12, we've -- 6 of them, we've taken off the list, so there's 6

left on the list." I said, "What if it's not one of those 6?" They said, "Well, we go back to the 360. We start over again." It's foolish. This -- this is a waste of resources and foolishness.

So they block out the community that knew her, block out the family that knew her, block out putting out knowledge so that people could -- can work with it; they have effectively protected whoever it was that killed her because no one has any details to look. It's the exact opposite of finding somebody, right.

So my objective isn't to point fingers at the police officer and I was quite -- he cried when we were done talking. And I think it's important and -- and I -- and this piece that I want to say is part of the reason why I'm here because it sounded really good when we were in front of the -- it must have been the passion I had with it. I don't feel like it's as strong now. But I said to him, I said -- "Well," I said, "You know the difference is that we've got two very different cultural practices and beliefs about justice and about policing." And I said, "You are operating under the pretense that because you're the police officer and you're the justice; you know, the whole system, that it's the appropriate way to do it." I said, "But I'm actually coming from a group of people who have persisted and consistently maintained and have, you

know, I mean we -- of course, we've went through a genocide, so there's been lots of things disrupted us, but we kept it alive, our laws. We kept our system of governments going and we still have lots of our traditional governance and justice practices in practice or in living knowledge. It may not necessarily be (unintelligible) -- be used in practice, but perpetuated in a living knowledge by making sure that the next generations know, I guess, partly in hopes that we will eventually rise out of this genocide and be able to function again as a independent, separate people."

Many people who've experience genocide and experienced assimilation in Canada, as Indigenous people, many of us are seeking to find a way to have a place at the table or a part -- to be a part. But many of us, who haven't subscribed to the assimilation plan, don't want a seat at the table and we don't want to be a part, and we're not looking for a few bread crumbs at the bakery because we own the bakery, right, and we want it back. And so that there's a very big difference and in terms of putting new letterhead on a courthouse and then putting a courthouse on the reserve, but if you're operating all the systems of the courthouse and all the rules that are the same that's in the -- of the province and the feds, it's the same courthouse, right.

And so what I said to that man -- that RCMP officer was -- I said, "You come from a culture of people who believe that the best way to deal with these sort of situations is to punish people." I said, "So much so that in your culture -- it's so old in your culture that we go look in your homeland -- where you're from, there's still castles standing where they have torture rooms, where you -- your people would take your criminals and you would drive metal stakes into their hands or tie up their ankles and their legs and stretch them until they're parts came off or cut off their heads or put them in dolls with nails in them and tighten them closed and kill them. This is the things that your -- the culture you come from, right. This is what informs your way of thinking to know and it's informing your reasoning to tell me why it's inappropriate to share with us the information and also inappropriate for you to close the case because you need to punish this guy." And I said, "We're not coming from a culture like that. We come from a culture of preventive action and restorative action."

So we're sort of -- you know, in our culture, in our traditions as Iroquoian people, as Mohawks, (inaudible) people -- Of course, my sister's mother was Cree and her stepmom was a Mohawk and, you know, we don't know what her dad was, at all, right. He didn't know. But

the tradition and laws of the land are Indigenous. So whether we're here in Richmond, British Columbia, there's people here that have a rich cultural practice and way of doing things. And the provincial rules and the federal rules, that's not the law of this land; it's the occupation of this land, right. It's -- it's being forced on.

And so I said to that man, I said, "The problem that we have and the reason why this murder and this kind of thing continues to happen is because the system that's been applied here was brought here and its purpose is to do that, right. It's a colonial-structure system that was developed by the Romans and the Romans -- when they dissipated, the British arose and then those British went all over the world with that same sort of systematic mentality of colonization and so the policing, the governance, the justice; it's all designed for the same purpose. You bring it into -- it's class designed, right. It's class designed for the accommodation of money and race so that they apply it into a region so they can take over the region, take control of the region, control all the assets of the region, and destroy whoever was the owner."

So if we go and look in Australia, there's a high population of murdered or missing women. Guess what? They're not red people. They're brown -- they're black people, right. They're the Indigenous people of Australia.

If you go -- if we go and we look in New Zealand, not too far away, we find another population of -- high population of murdered and missing women; men too, and who are they? The Māori. And if we go and look in -- and what's very interesting with this -- with this system that we're dealing with is that once it destroys the Indigenous population, it will move on and place the next like least important people as the next at the bottom.

So we'll look at a place like Jamaica, they impose the same sort of system there and what happened? The Taińo got completely destroyed, then they became the slaves who became -- take that same place. And who are the murdered and missing disproportionately in Jamaica? Those people. And so it's the system. It's not the Indigenous -- it's not that because the brown people in Canada are messed up or broken and it's our own fault. No, no, no, it's the system that was imposed on our lands that's designed to do this to us.

And so I said to that officer, I said, "I would like you to do me a favour." I said, "You didn't provide me with anything really of value or substance, but I did appreciate the opportunity because it gave me a chance to begin the process of healing, to cry about that and to talk about it with my sister and to make me think about it to find a way to articulate my concern about what

has been going on, right."

So I've got five daughters. I've got five daughters, beautiful daughters, and I'm terrified every time they get on a train or go somewhere because I know what country we live in. I know that they're the most likely to go missing or be killed, right. I do not believe that Canada is a safe place for my children. So I live in a perpetual state of fear and I live in my homeland. I live in my traditional territory, right. My children are not safe to explore the beauty of our own land on their own. And I'm not unique. Every Indigenous family in this country is suffering in the same way. We talk about post traumatic stress disorder; well, you should look at how that kind of thing impacts somebody's psyche.

And so I think that my thoughts about my sister's murder -- and we've been talking about this lots and my mom's like, "I don't want the case closed because I don't want her forgotten, but I don't want her to be dismissed". And I agree and I don't want her either. I mean we're going to where -- our hope is tomorrow that we're going to go to the place where they found her because we've never been there and we're going to go to where she was buried tomorrow, you know, so she's not at all forgotten.

And I don't believe for a minute that me

saying to the RCMP officer in some office somewhere in Toronto that holds the case is going to make a difference anyways, but I asked him to write a report. I said, "Write a report to your -- the one above you and tell them what you heard here and all our family, how you treated us -- your system, right."

And I was a little bit disappointed that RCMP officer, he was not aware that the RCMP were developed and made for the purpose of clearing the West, right. I said, "In the United States, they had a occupation called cowboy and they cleared the West with the cowboys. They killed the Indians and they got paid per scalps and they claimed ownership of territory by the use of cattle, right. It was too expensive to put fences across it, so they used cattle instead. I think it proved that they moved their cattle across and grazed on it, then they owned the land. And that was the part of their process of colonization and to remove the Indians from the land. In Canada, they used the RCMP, surveyors, and a train, right. It was the same thing." I was disappointed that that officer didn't know that.

Anyways, I -- I'm a little bit lost in my thoughts, but I think that we need to -- there needs to be a serious change in the system such that the Indigenous people of whatever region in this country, Canada, are the

leaders in investigations of crimes against our people. And when I say leaders, I mean we need to be the ones who are assigned to the positions of head investigator, of -- of the top policing officer on the case; these sorts of things.

We also, I believe, need to be utilizing traditional, Indigenous governance, justice, and policing practices within traditional territory; so not just on the reserve, but off the reserve, and it needs to be applied to all of the immigrants on the land including the Indigenous people, but the immigrants too.

There's been this practice in Canada where there tried to allow us to make room for us, but it means that our little -- our little bit of rules, our little bit of laws that get to be for us are only for us on our own land. So you can practice your traditional fishing for you, but we're going to continue to practice commercial fishing for us on your fishing ground.

No, no, no, that -- that's the problem. That is the issue with this thing with murdered and missing women is that the predator is looking around to find its prey and he's going to attack the one that's the least dangerous to him and if you -- if he is able to attack the one who no one is going to hunt him back for and even if he gets in trouble -- even if he gets caught, the worst that's

going to happen is he's going to get to go to jail, get free food, a place to sleep, and then he'll be out soon. There's not even a threat as a predator. If you apply Indigenous law to this very same sort of thing, those predators will choose different people, right.

In my peoples' law, one of our practices is that if you like kill somebody, it's up to the people of course. This (inaudible) unique in the circumstance and each circumstance is dealt with on its own accord. Every single case has its own -- it's taken on its own; there's not a prerequisite set of rules applied. There are certain things, but you have to listen to all what -- just the uniqueness of that particular circumstance.

But one of our practices is that if you kill somebody, then you get given to the family to replace the person you killed for them to decide what they're going to do with you. They might keep you. They might make you a -- you know, force you to take a following role or they might decide to take your life. That's our law on this land.

We were talking about it earlier -- my mother and I and some others -- and, you know, that sometimes people think that's harsh. But that's the thing is that that's the judgment of another peoples' culture and another peoples' laws and say, "Oh, well, we don't like

that. That's harsh. Oh, we don't like that, you know." Or maybe it's a -- maybe it's another cultural practice like you see over in Asia and people are eating centipedes and they're eating chicken feet and whatever and somebody might be like, "Oh, that's gross. I don't like that, right". It's the same sort of thing.

So for a culture of people who deal with things like if you kill somebody, then the family decides what they're going to do with you and they have the option to say your life needs to be put to rest (inaudible). From a Canada -- Canadian perspective, general-libertarian belief system, they might think that's inappropriate or uncalled for, whatever. But if you're looking at it from a preventative perspective, people would be very less inclined to do that; wouldn't they?

I was sitting with a lady today and she was telling me a very horrible story about something that happened to her and I'm not going to share the details about that. I think she told me like a horrible story that the person who did it to her is free or might be (unintelligible). That -- that's a -- there's -- there was no healing, no fixing it up, no restorative thing. That's the problem.

And so like, in our tradition, the details of the evidence; what's going on, it's before all the

people -- the people, all the community, the whole community. Everybody knows what happened. It's all talked about. Here's all of what we know. Now, we're going to work together, all of us; we're going to find what is the solution. We're all together going to figure out who did it or what did it or why did this happen. Now, we're going to come to a solution about how we're going to solve that. And maybe it's that, you know, the person who did it is not okay and maybe we're going to choose to help that person that caused -- did something terrible, but they're broken themselves. And maybe not, maybe it's going to something else, but that's our way of doing it.

And I believe that if we want to stop this continuous murder and missing women, -- and we've got a great big pile -- great big, long list of murdered and missing men, as well, and some people are saying there might be larger numbers than the women -- then I think that we need to earnestly look at changing the current system as it plays out in these different communities and different territories throughout Canada. And I don't think that putting native letterhead on the policing or putting a, you know, first nations constable on the badge is the way to do it because it needs the systemic things changed and it means that the people of -- with privilege and power need to be removed. Those systems within -- those pieces within

the system that give them privilege and power need to be removed so that that privileged predator doesn't feel safe. It's the only way; otherwise, it will continue. You won't stop it.

And there's no way to do, you know -- the system is designed to ruin the people at the bottom. I mean we -- we've got to look at a hotel room anywhere in the world -- in the colonial world and you'll find out who's the bottom people in that community. They're the people cleaning the hotel, right. You go to Florida, they're all Cuban and you go to British Columbia and (unintelligible). I know some -- all certain ethnic group and you go somewhere else, a different ethnic group. So it doesn't mean that people are predisposed of this culture to clean hotels. No, it has to do with where they are in the stratus of the class system, right. And that's the way this thing works. And so it we're going to talk about change and we're talk about reconciliation, then what we need to talk about is the deconstructing of a system that's designed to destroy the Indigenous population. And whether it's the residential school or education system, policing, or justice; that's what their purpose is.

Anyways, I think I've said enough. I'm sad that this happened to our family and we're working at our own healing to fix that stuff. And I don't believe that --

I don't believe Canada has anything to offer us to help us because every time they offer us something, we hurt more. It needs to be us, as Indigenous people, at the driver's seat and at the decision making about how we move forward, not somebody else at a table listening to us and then making a decision on our behalf. We don't need that anymore. We don't need no more Indian agents, you know. We're good. We're good.

So my sister's space is still open and maybe they'll find who did it, yeah. They might even punish him, but it's not going to make any difference to change things for the people in the future or for our family. But if we make changes in the way the policing system works and the way the justice system works, then I think that we got a better chance that my children or my grandchildren won't have to be afraid to move around on their -- in their own land.

Do you have more questions?

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: I have lots of them now. I have a couple, yeah.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Okay, ask away then.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Okay.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: She can answer them.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Seth, you and I have had some long conversation about a whole bunch of issues

and today you shared some of what we've talked about and, in particular, you did share some details about your traditional justice in your community.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Mm-hmm.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: And it's my understanding that the traditional justice in your community was still consequence-based, ---

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Mm-hmm.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: --- but the consequences were based on the unique -- as you mentioned, the entire community would determine the consequences based on the unique circumstances of whatever offence was committed.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: And that the unique circumstances, as determined by the community, my understanding in our conversation is often found in the language that's used to describe what happened ---

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Mm-hmm.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: --- and also in the language that sets out the law of the community. Can you speak a little bit about the importance of language in traditional justice system in your community; the differences -- say the distinctions between the, say, language we would use and the language traditional in your

community?

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Okay, yeah, I can talk about that a little bit. But again, that goes back to the system.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Mm-hmm.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: So we've got this system that was developed by the English and then we've got a series of languages: English, Spanish, French; all colonial cultures, right. The colonizing cultures went all over the world and did -- and they used almost a cookie-cutter system, which they do -- did it, right. I mean the British and the French like to say that the Spanish were a little worse than everybody else in their treatment of Indigenous people; yet when you look at those countries, there's more Indigenous people alive than in the places where the French and the English were. I think it's a little bit of a pot calling the kettle black. However, all of those languages have the same base -- same structure in which they're organized. They're actual colonial in their system themselves.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Mm-hmm.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: So when we talk about the structure of a system, we have to look at the language in which that is developed it because our language is like our operating system of our -- right -- to the operations to

our mind, right. So we're -- if we want to make something new, then -- if we want to create something new, then choosing the language that we're going to write it in or create it in will impact the way in which it's structured.

And so when I was talking about how we describe things in our language like crimes, they have very different meaning than when we say the same thing in English because English is a colonial structure itself. For example, we have a -- we talk about -- there's certain -- like our three most --like highest crimes, right, is like murder and rape and what we call -- the word they use in English is treason, but it's not treason, not in the same sense, not in the -- not what treason means in English, right, because treason basically is a -- to do something against the state or against the sovereign, right? That's treason.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Mm-hmm.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: In our language, the word that we use for that is -- hold on a second; I will have to think about it. It's been a while. We said -- I said to you the other day, -- and I haven't talked about it in a while -- it's like (speaking in Mohawk language). It's like eating away or cutting away at a root and it's talking about the roots of the peace tree and so what it means is that it's someone who has actively worked at trying to

undermine to make our constitution fall apart, like someone who's seeking to destroy the fabric of a society, right. This is someone who's, in our language, caused treason. So like maybe someone who -- it's sort of funny. So because of that, people will accuse each other of -- like people who ran in elected band council -- as undermined the fabric of our culture and our traditional governance structure and they'll say, "Well, he's committing treason," someone who's running for elected band council or become a band councillor. I'm serious. That's the kind of discussion that happens. So that's very different than some corporate -- some spy that is, you know, actively working at overthrowing the king, right. It's a different thing because one is about the sanctuary and peace of the people, interrupting that, as opposed to someone in power, right.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Mm-hmm.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: So language impacts the way in which we think about governance and the way we think about the structure of justice. Or, for example, we have a word like (speaking in Mohawk language) or (in Mohawk), they're very close and the one word means that he -- it means he put the skin in her and the other word is he put the skin in her for his and her benefit. They're very close, the words, but very, very specific about what's being said. One, they had sex and they both enjoyed it.

They were both -- they were, you know, consentuing (sic). It doesn't say -- use the word consentuing (sic). It means they were both benefitting from it, right. The other one is -- there's no benefit. So in our language, if you have sex and you're both not benefitting from it, it's rape. That's very different than the English perception about what rape is, right. So that -- even that sort of like pressured from marriage sort of sex where one partner's just feels like they are forced to do what the other one is wanting, it's not necessarily considered rape in Western culture. It's not, right, unless it's like, "I'm not consenting," but if you feel like you got to then. But in our language, that -- that's -- that is not (in Mohawk language), right. You and I are both benefitting from that, so it's a very different perception in there for it impacts the way in which we address it and they way we think about it and the way we deal with it. And so ---

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: It's (inaudible).

MR. SETH LEFORTE: It's a world -- well, it's world view, but it's ---

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: It's a world view, yeah.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: --- but it's -- it's a -- it's the way we perceive. And so when we look in all this throughout Canada, when we talk about making change and

reconciliation, we have to take it into consideration Indigenous language in that process of developing up new systems because the languages were born from this soil, from this land. They're innate from this land. How -- they came from this land in the same way that the trees grew from this land and so they're a part of it. And if you use the language from the -- from a land, it will flourish because there -- it forces the people to be symbiotic with the environment which the language came from. When you impose a language -- operating system of a people from a different land on to that land, they treat the land like they do wherever they came from and it's liking bringing an invasive species by changing the way in which the people think or bringing a different way of thinking to that land.

And so my thoughts about (inaudible) or my thoughts about justice and, particularly, about murdered and missing women is that we need to consider the alterations and changes in the system. We have to take into consideration the language of the people of the area and embed that into the process. And I strongly believe that it needs to apply not only to aboriginal community, but the non-aboriginal community, as well, because there -- otherwise, there -- it doesn't -- there'd just be -- they're just an invasive species in the way in which they

act. Like whether it's a plant or an animal or a person, they will -- they'll disrupt the ecosystem. So we've got this disrupted ecosystem and the indigenous plants and Indigenous people are being harmed by the invaders, so my thoughts about the solution is to alter the invaders so that they fit with the environment and the people here and the culture.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Mm-hmm.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Yeah.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Okay.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: That's why I have a real issue with the word "settler," right, because the pioneer and settler are colonial and imperial powers, right, and that's got to come to an end.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Does your mom have anything -- do you have anything to add?

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: (Inaudible).

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: (Inaudible).

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Because I talk too much.

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: I think my son speaks enough for both of us, but my thought is just -- sorry, but my thought is really -- it's about world view. It's a totally different world view. Like it's about relationship and with our -- with language. All of language is based on, you know, how it relates to me or to my person next to

me or the earth and I think the existing justice system separates all relationship. Like if you were doing something where the person has to -- for example, you know, I break the window out of the next door neighbour's shed; if I'm -- if I get charged, then I just have to go on probation and do some community hours, but I don't have to go and deal with the neighbour. Like what am I really learning from that and how does my neighbour feel that they've had any kind of retribution, right? All they know is that I was punished. Whereas, if you're forced to deal directly with the people that you've hurt, it makes it a totally different scenario. I would think there's more opportunity for forgiveness and making amends. You never can take it away; what's done, but you can try to make up for whatever mistakes.

I mean, you know, we're talking -- I'm suspecting that these people who have done all these -- the murders, they have severe psychiatric issues, so I don't know how we really can do that kind of restorative thing with them, but I'm sure we could come up with ways of managing with those things even because everybody has a story. Everybody has some trauma back in their life that has gotten to this place where they are, right, and whether or not they were supported or they were able to work with it. So anyway, I think that's about it.

It's really about -- for me, it's really about perspective and world view and how you see a crime or how you see an injustice and how to deal with it. And the whole punishment thing, to me, doesn't work, you know. How many offenders go in and come out continually because that system does not work? So I don't know that we're going to -- you know, I don't know whether you're going to come up with some incredible plan to how we're going to make these changes happen. But, you know, I'm hopeful; there's a possibility. So anyways, thanks for listening.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: I just wanted to point out one thing. Like my mom made a really important point about -- like pointing to a smaller issue of a window being broken, right. And, I mean, we're talking about really heavy and I -- I've been pointing out on really heavy topics like murder and rape and those sorts of things, but in terms of justice and in terms of like another way of doing it and I mean, absolutely, it's all the little things, too, right. It's the neighbour who's having an issue with the other neighbour over his dog that won't stop pooping in his yard, right. It's about addressing and dealing with those sorts of issues.

And they're all embedded. They're all entrenched in the system in which we use and where -- wherever in the world you are and whatever system's being

used, there's a process and so I believe that the issue that's going on with murdered and missing women is about that process and about the system and I believe it's because it was intentional, right. And so if we're at a place to change that, then we got to look at that system and say, "Okay, let's revamp". And of course it's going to be hard.

My mom's -- I can tell, she's not too hopeful that there's going to be a major change and I get it because it's unlikely that those in positions of -- I want to use the word "power," but that's not the word, positions of privilege don't want to give that up. And what we're talking about is a change in that privilege, right, and then giving -- assigning privilege and strength to people who have been perceived for 200 hundred years, now, as the least important and the least powerful and the least deserving of privilege, right. We're going to give it to them, right. What? The police wouldn't even let us know the information about my sister's murder because we might be irresponsible with it, right. That's what they said to me, right. I said, "What the hell"? What -- that's right. That's the way it is. Sorry, I don't know if I'm allowed to say that, but ---

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: So now, one of the things -- the comments -- I wrote it down -- that you had

made in our conversation was that traditionally offenders were marked and weren't simply hidden away in prison.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's a bit of a controversial one, but there's lots -- that's one of those things that it doesn't get done anymore, but it gets -- is being kept alive in our oral tradition. I mean certainly there's lots that's happening where people are like trying to keep beliefs and traditions and knowledge alive so that, in the future, I believe there's a hope that we will restore those things that were -- it was made illegal, right, and not allowed for us to do.

We currently are not allowed to pursue and deal with our criminals unless we just do it. But, otherwise, we're in conflict with the police state and the Canadian government, right. We're not allowed -- we're currently not allowed, so lots of things we talk about to perpetuate the knowledge, but were actually not in practice and so this is one of those things where I have never, in my lifetime, seen it in practice. I've seen lots of justice stuff in practice, even some -- yeah, lots of things in practice, but certainly this one I haven't and it's about marking.

And so, yeah, I remember them older people talking about that; that, you know, someone like a rapist or something, they would mark them if they got banished so

that everybody else knew who they were, right. We wouldn't hide their identity, give them -- you know, it wasn't like -- because we don't believe in that while you served your time and now you live your life and, you know, people aren't going to ridicule you. We actually use ridicule and we use certain levels of shame and we use like, yeah, public knowledge to curb the behaviour of individuals and to also keep the people informed.

So, for example, a rapist, the whole people would say -- they would cut their nose off so that everywhere they go everyone would know that this is a rapist and they're not welcome. They would banish them out of the community. So, in our language, that's like being dead. So they punish them to death and they're -- they had to leave. It didn't mean they killed them. It meant they had to leave. They're no longer going to be taken care of and they cut off their nose. So wherever they went -- a village they come to, people know what they did and "You're not welcome here. Away you go," right. So they become exiled on their own, right. Their punishment is they can't get along with everybody and they can't stop harming people, then they're going to be by themselves. And so we don't protect their identity, right. We don't protect -- the impact -- the evidence is put out in the open and everybody knows it.

Or another example I heard about -- people talking about -- I actually seen this -- where there was a -- they'd done something they're not supposed to do and people would tell them over and over and over and they continued to do it and then they have -- they make a -- they make two lines, two rows of people, and the people will all gather together -- community or the community of people around that person. It might be their clan or it might be the village or whatever; it might be all the women. If it's a woman that's acting up, all the rest of the women meet together and they're decided how they're going to handle this. So they might decide to do something.

And I know of an example of a young man who kept stealing bicycles and stealing in the community and so his peers gathered him up and they invited the people that he had stolen from to come to watch this and they made him swim. There was an island. They made him swim out to the island and back, but he didn't know what was coming. So when he returned to the island, all of his friends had red willow switches and they -- he had to run up this little like a pathway, I guess, and they're all lined up on either side and all of his peers whipped him as he ran -- as he went through there and yelled at him and scolded him for his bad behaviour and that he needs to not be that way no

more. And at the very end of that row of line were all the people that they had -- he had stolen from. And when he was all done, they had a feast and now he's not allowed to steal no more, right.

That's the -- he was at the tipping point. There was like a series of these things, so you have a little meeting. You have a family. They have a -- the larger community event and so on and then he's -- how do I describe it? Like he's getting shamed, right. But he's also -- he also had a little pain involved in it, but it's not about a punishment; it's about him not doing that no more, right. So it wasn't about physically harming him and it's not really long or that sort of thing. I've seen that. I've seen that happen. So it's still in practice, but it's where -- it's in practice very small numbers of people who still believe in their way, right.

As soon as somebody, they don't like that, then they, "Oh, I want the European system. I want that to be what it's going to be," because it's easier, safer, right. It protects you. You can probably get away with it or whatever. Or like -- or if you have a good lawyer and you've got enough money, right. Or maybe it's a child -- maybe a child. I've seen this lots and lots and the kids acting up and he's mouthing off and saying rude things to his mother, you know, so then the mother, she calls her

mother over and her sisters over and her father over and all the neighbours and one by one, all the people come to visit and have tea or whatever and she tells them what the kid did in front of the kid. "You should have heard the way he was speaking to me this morning, what he said to me. He did all this terrible thing. He's stomping his feet and he broke the window."

And then the other person, of course, turns to the kid and "Why did you do that to your mother"? and "Why did you act that way"? and "That's not okay". And so they get scolded like 20 times, right, by every person that -- that's important to them. All the people that love that little kid, right, they all come. And they call them up and say, "Hey, she's acting up. I need you to come over and have tea with me". "Oh, okay." And so they come over and it's -- they're doing it together, right. They're curbing their behaviour by shaming them, but it's not harming them emotionally, right. It's not shame where they're carrying around pain. It's more like they're embarrassed because -- so then what happens is they don't want to ever do that again, right, because -- it's not because they're going to get yelled at or because they're going to get spanked or because they're going to get sent to their room; it's because every single person that loves them is going to know they're acting up, right, and be

disappointed in them. And so now the person is the child or older person and even an adult, even me, you know, don't want everybody that you love to be disappointed in you, so it curbs your behaviour.

Indigenous people in this land have lots to offer about how to live here and we did it. I mean this wasn't a -- this incredible place with all these resources accidently because we were like, you know, walking around grunting and eating berries. It was because we were actively making a change in the way in which the environment was -- we were a part of the ecology, right, and so our way of thinking and our way of doing things is a part of that. And so I believe that we need to -- that needs to be risen to the surface and that these newcomers that have come here need to -- they need to immigrate into the land they've come to.

If they want to talk about reconciliation, that's what we're talking about. And if we're going to change this murdered and missing women thing, then that's what we're talking about and that means total system changes, not figureheads and new paint and, you know, a different name, you know, Indian name for their organization. If it's a CAS office building and it has Ojibway name on it or a CAS office building and it has English on it, it's still a CAS office building. It's

still taking the children, right; it doesn't change. So it's the systems that need to be altered.

And so, you know, I don't know if this is true. My dad told me once in passing -- we were talking about my sister Melissa and I asked him, "Tell me about her or something"? And he said, "You know, you're real interested in your culture." I said, "Yeah." He said, "You know your sister was too." I said, "Really?" He said, "She had a jingle dress." And I was surprised that my dad knew about that or said that, right. And so every single time, when I was younger, going to pow wows or whatever and I'd see the jingle dress dancers, every -- even now, I'm 40 years old and I see the jingle dress dancers, I imagine that my sister danced like that once, you know. And it's a little bit of a -- I'm sorry. It's a little bit of peace for me.

And so I believe that my sister's death is a -- is on account of a system that was designed to break us, right, and I'm refusing to be broken and I'm refusing to raise children who are going to have to be broken too. And so I'm here, halfway across our world and my little girl said, "Where are you going"? I said, "To the edge of the world," right. It's the edge of our world, right. She said, "That's really far." I said, "Yeah." Because I hope that we can make a change.

And I said I wasn't going to say this, but I'm going to say it. I know that you're going to be taking an effort to write a report and you're going to gather up what all of us families have had to say and all the hurt and all the things that we have experienced and what we're talking about to talk about solutions for the murdered and missing women and I hope that you -- when you, as commissioners, gather together and you write a report, that you write one that has teeth in it and write one that has some value.

We've had a number of these reports, you know, on the commission, on aboriginal people and the Ipperwash Report and that most recent one on Mr. -- Judge Sinclair endorsed and none of them had any teeth you know. There's no such thing as cultural genocide. It's not a crime. Genocide's a crime. Canada could have got in trouble if he would have said genocide, you know. Taking your children from one population to another is genocide. If he'd have said that, we would have had teeth in that document. There would have been legal implications and there would have been a force of change, but they didn't. They chose to put something there that didn't mean anything, so it's safe.

I would ask that -- I have to morally and ethically, I have to say it. I have to ask you to write a

document that has some teeth and that's not just going to be safe for those in positions of power because then it was -- if not, it was just a waste of time and it was an opportunity for the federal government to spend a little bit of money to allow us to have dinner and a flight, you know, here or there and make themselves say, "Look what we spent to help you out with murdered and missing women". If they just -- if all it is is a -- an opportunity for them to spend a little bit of money and then it was a -- it's a -- it's just a joke.

So I liked what you had to say while we were standing talking and I am hopeful that you'll write something with some teeth. If they don't change, well, we'll keep fighting. I don't think I've got any more to say.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Chief Commissioner Buller, do you have any questions or comments for the -- either of the witnesses?

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: Yeah, I do, a lot, but I'll try to be brief. I have kind of a hypothetical scenario for you and I -- I'd like your comments. But by way of background, I'll explain something or describe something.

My grandfather told me, a long time ago,

that on his reserve -- because they had reserves back -- way back then even -- and if he was alive -- I was just doing the math in my head; if he was still alive, he'd be about a hundred and thirty years old. So way back -- and he went to residential school. That might give you an idea of context for time.

Even still, in his community, his reserve, calling the police was shame -- shameful. It was a last resort or worse than a last resort because it meant that the community failed -- the community, as a whole, failed.

So fast forward a little bit, some decades, and we're living in something other than the 1800s or the 1900s; you pick your decade, and kids are out playing, as kids do, and property -- somebody's property is damaged. It seems like there's some options. We can take our child to our neighbour and say, "We apologize and we'll fix the window," or the neighbour can call the police or maybe a little combination of the two.

You said that we're not allowed to deal with our own crime. Well, actually we are. Nobody says we have to call the police. So what happened? Where did we go sideways? How did we get lost there in not dealing with our problems on our own territories in our own ways? Is that a -- is that reach of the police another reach of colonization that we don't recognize?

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: I would say absolutely. Like I'm remembering -- I work in our community. I've worked there for a long time and maybe in 19 -- let's say 1988 or something like that, I was asked to go with our elected chief to do a presentation at the school about -- I don't know -- services in the community. And I was just -- I was so disturbed, but I couldn't say it.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: Mm-hmm.

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: But he was talking about, you know, "We used to be -- our grandmother used to do canning and we'd have to work hard in the gardens and we would, you know, have things stored up for the winter. All the kids worked in our gardens and stuff like that. Well, you don't have to do that now. You know, if your dad loses his job, we don't have to worry about it because you can apply for welfare," as it was called welfare at the time.

And I can remember sitting there thinking, "This is not progress. This is disconnecting us from our families and from each other as community members." And I think that it is evolved in every community. It's like an insidious thing where having all these other systems are better than what we were doing on our own. It's harder to do it on our own than it was -- than it is when you have these new systems, right, that are replications of what goes on outside of our communities in greater society.

So I think that is just the reality of it; it's colonization. And for the most part, there's a generation of people; I would say my mother's generation and maybe back another one, where people believed that was better. Then there's some of us who are questioning that. Once you learn about, you know, your own culture and traditions, you start saying, "Well, why aren't we doing it anymore? Like, this is wrong how we're living because it's not working for us, right".

I mean I've been around for a long time working in child welfare, for example, and we talk about the Sixties Scoop and how horrendous that was; there's way more kids in care and from our communities than there ever was in the sixties.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right now?

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: Yes, right now, way more than there was in the sixties. So it's like; what is going on? Things are not getting any better. Our kids are not taken because they're being abused and battered. It's mostly neglect situations, right. They don't have enough money. They don't have proper housing. Maybe somebody has addictions. All of those things are fixable, but kids are taken and they're taken and they're placed in resources that are not necessarily native resources or people that know about them, right, because in our communities, our

families can't pass the tests. They can't pass all those requirements to have a certain kind of house and so many rooms and X amount of money. Like, so it's set up for -- to fail for us and I think that's truly what's happened. It's just slid right in there everywhere.

So that in our communities -- well, our community, in particular, you have a split of people that are traditionally-minded and you have a people that are more colonized and buy into the system and that's the right way to do it and it's frustrating because it's like we fight each other in our perspectives, right. So I don't know what the answer is to that. How do you decolonize? We talk about it a lot, but like, for me, I think about my children who have had the opportunity to learn more about themselves than I did growing up and the fact that they have grasped on to language, so they now are teachers in our community because they chose to learn the language. And I can see in, like, 25 years the incredible change that has happened in our community, so I'm feeling hopeful of that. There's enough of us now -- and I'm in my sixties now, there's enough of us now who have had an impact on our children coming down, so I can see the change. Sometimes it seems like it's slow, but when you're around long enough, you can look back 25-30 years and say, "Wow, we really did do something right".

So I think that's where my hopefulness came because, yes, I think there are some people who are actively choosing to decolonize and I believe that's exactly what it was that, you know, you were talking about. It started slipping in there and people starting accepting it. "Oh, yeah, that's better. We don't have to help our sister next door because there's a social system there that'll do that. We don't have to share our food because they can go down and get some -- something at the food bank."

I'm not saying that's wrong; I'm just saying those systems being put in place, in many respects, have allowed us to become or caused us to become disconnected. We don't have to take care of our brothers and sisters or older relatives or anything because there's something else that's put in its place and the problem is that other thing that's put in its place is designed by a system that's not ours, right. It's not ours. If we were doing it ourselves, we might have done it differently. But it's been imposed on us, so we struggle with it.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: Yeah, well ---

MR. SETH LEFORTE: I'm not even going to say anything.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: I just have one more comment to make. I have to tell you something I've

been dying to say all day today.

I used to be a judge and I was in family court one day, not too far from here, and it was a First Nation's man who was trying to get his daughter back from the social workers and there was a parenting report done about his ability to parent his child and I read it before we went into court.

I walked in and the social workers started talking about how this just simply wasn't a workable solution that the child go back to the dad. And so I looked at the social workers and I looked at the dad, who was a traditional man, a young man, and I said to him, "I have -- I've got some great news for you". And every -- you could hear a pin drop. "You fail as a white, urban, male dad and I am so proud of you."

So Seth, you fail as a white, urban dad and I'm so proud of you.

(LAUGHTER)

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: Thank you.

MR. SETH LEFORTE: That's a great compliment. I appreciate that.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: Yeah.

MS. LINDA LEFORTE: (Inaudible).

MR. SETH LEFORTE: (Inaudible).

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: Well ---

MR. SETH LEFORTE: (Inaudible).

CHIEF COMMISSIONER BULLER: Well, it is meant as a compliment. And to make a very long story short, within 20 minutes of saying that in court, I returned the little girl to her dad, but I've never forgotten that.

So having said that, I want to thank both of you very much. What you said today is really important to our work and really heartwarming for me because I think we're of the same minds and where we have to go with the report. So I'm very grateful for what you did say in terms of our work.

I also want to say personally, I'm very grateful that you're here. I've learned a lot from you and I've learned some Mohawk words and some more Mohawk culture and traditions, so thank you for that as well. It's been a real pleasure to spend time with both of you and I'm personally very grateful for that. And I'm going to remember the invasive species analogy; I think that's bang on. So thank you.

You've given us a lot today and in return, if you'll accept them, we have some gifts for you. The first one is an eagle feather. I think I've learned, all across Canada now, we, as Indigenous people, share stories about eagle feathers and significance of eagle feathers and

my teachings from the (unintelligible) that, of course, eagle feathers lift you up and hold you up when you need to be lifted up and held up and they'll help you achieve your dreams. So we have eagle feathers for you.

Then -- and I hope you have more luck than I did -- we have some seeds for you to plant. I've had no luck with them in my garden.

When the commissioners and I started this work, what we wanted to have happen was not only a great report, but also that there would be healing, as a process, in our work we do and that there'd be new growth coming from that healing. And so we decided, as gifts, we wanted to give seeds because seeds are new growth and hopefully healing. So all I can say is good luck with the seeds. I hope you have better luck than I did.

So thank you again. It's been a wonderful opportunity. And we're adjourned.

Upon adjourning at 19:29

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

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

Vicki Backman

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Vicki Backman

April 16, 2018