National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Truth-Gathering Process

Part 1 Public Hearings

Radisson Hotel, Ambassador A Room
Winnipeg, Manitoba

PUBLIC

Monday October 16, 2017

Public Volume 9

Joan Winning, Isabel Winning & Stephanie Daniels,
In relation to Nicole Ashley Daniels;

Betty Rourke, Mike Rourke, Lorna Sinclair, Elora Sinclair, Kim McPherson, Corley McPherson, Gerri Pangman & Lorie Anderson, In relation to Jennifer Glenna Johnston, Jennifer McPherson & Myrna Letandre (Part 1 of 2);

Rachel & Matthew Willan

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## II

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<tr>
<td>Assembly of First Nations</td>
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<td>Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak/Women of the Metis Nation</td>
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<td>Government of Canada</td>
<td>Anne Turley (Legal counsel)</td>
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<td>Amber Elliot (Legal counsel)</td>
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<td>Christine Ashcroft (Legal counsel)</td>
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<td>Government of Manitoba</td>
<td>Kendra Jarvinen (Legal counsel)</td>
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<td>Coral Lang (Legal counsel)</td>
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<td>Beth Symes (Legal counsel)</td>
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<td>Winnipeg Police Service</td>
<td>Shannon Hanlin (Legal counsel)</td>
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**Note:** For the purpose of establishing this record of attendance, counsel are considered present whether they attended one or all of the public hearings held over the course of the day at the Radisson Hotel, Ambassador A (i.e. the main public hearing space).
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# IV

## LIST OF EXHIBITS

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<td>1</td>
<td>Digital Powerpoint presentation filename “Daniels family” comprising 17 colour photos (11 family photos and six line drawings).</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>SEALED</strong> Manitoba Report of Medical Examiner / Autopsy Report Form for Nicole Daniels (six pages) &amp; Toxicology report (two pages)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Video “In Memory of Jennifer Dawn McPherson October 14, 1971- May 5, 2013” set to Abba’s “Dancing Queen”; duration 12 minutes 20 seconds. (Note: see October 17, 2017 transcript for subsequent testimony and exhibits).</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Unnumbered and unmarked set of seven black-and-white photocopies of photos of Rachel Willan at various points of her life as a young woman.</td>
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<td>Digital image of tattoo over self-harm photograph.</td>
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<td>Single small-format digital image of Willan family.</td>
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--- Upon commencing on Monday, October 16, 2017 at 10:17

**MS. TERRELLYN FEARN:** My name is Terrellyn Fearn, and I am the Director of Health and Community Relations with the National Inquiry. I am very honoured and grateful to be here today. I am a visitor to this beautiful Treaty 1 and Métis territory. And, thank you for inviting me so graciously to be here.

I am from Glooscap First Nation in Mi’kmaq. Does anybody know where that is? Not you, you don’t count. Anyone? That’s in what we would -- probably be known today as Nova Scotia. So, I am from the east coast. I currently live on the unceded territory of the Mississaugas of New Credit in Ontario, and again, very humbled to be here as a guest.

While we’re just waiting for a few to get settled, I just wanted to do a few quick announcements. First of all, I want to honour and acknowledge all the families and survivors that are going to be sharing their story today. And, their stories may contain information that’s painful; it will contain information that’s inspiring and contains resilience. I want to honour their courage and their bravery today in coming forward and sharing their story with all of us here and with all of you that may be watching.
Along the chairs, we have plastic bags -- sorry, paper bags and they have “tears” written on them. What we would like to ask you, if you’re comfortable with taking your tears -- your tissues with your tears and putting those into those bags. The tears are healing and part of our gifts that we were given to emote or feel what we’re feeling as we walk on this earth, on this journey, and our tears can be healing of our pain; they can be there to help celebrate us, joy and laughter. But, they are medicine, those tears are medicine. And, we have spoken with the fire keepers who have agreed to take those tears at the end of every day and offer them into the beautiful sacred fire that was lit this morning and that’s burning. So, we have them in this main public hearing room, the other public hearing room and all the other venues where families and survivors are going to be sharing their story.

I also want to put a reminder that as we listen to these stories, they can impact us and resonate within us as well. And so, it’s important that we all take good care of ourselves throughout the next four, five days as we are gathered here together, and after. And, that beautiful opening that happened this morning at sunrise, that beautiful fire that was lit, the beautiful water and pipe ceremonies that will be happening every day is there to help all of you and support us through this journey.
So, please, just to let you know, we have shuttle services that are going from the Radisson to the Oodena Circle, and you can take a free shuttle to move freely back and forth from those spaces. So, please use those medicines that are available.

Across the hall, we have an Elders Room with medicines as well. We have beautiful Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, spiritual, faith based Elders who have agreed and wanted so passionately to come and to support the families and survivors and all of you. And, they will be in that space to be there, if you would like to sit, if you would like to talk, if you would just like to have some tea or a little bite to eat. So, please access that Elders Room just across the hall as well.

If you look around the room, you will see many purple shirts. Raise your hands. We have many wonderful supports that are here to support all of you and the families and survivors over the next five days. And, if you turn around, you’ll see on the back of their shirt, it says quite clearly, “Health Support”. So, please, if you feel you would like to sit with someone, if you have a question, if you have any information that you would like, please reach out to one of these individuals in the purple shirts. They would be happy to assist you in the needs that you have. We will also be reciprocating that and
reaching out to you and checking in with you, just to make sure that you -- any needs that you may have, we’re here to support that.

We also have a registered nurse onsite as well -- oh, there she is down at the back, Gillian. She will be at the main registration desk. She’s going to be setting up her nursing station there. The main registration desk is when you came off the elevator of this floor. She will be walking and circulating through both of these public hearing rooms as well, but please, if you have something or an urgent matter, please let the purple shirts know, go to her directly or come to myself.

Just a couple of things about meals. So, all of the snacks, morning and afternoon snacks, will be in this room, as well as lunch. So, if you look in the back, the lunch will be set up here for those of you that are coming to witness the testimony that will be happening today. The families and their supports, your meals will be in the Family Room that’s located as well for you; okay? If you have any questions, again, don’t hesitate to reach out to one of the wonderful staff of the Inquiry, they have the green staff lanyard, or one of the health supports.

And, I’ve just been graciously reminded that over to the left here, we have water in the copper vessels and the paper cups, and the grandmothers blessed that water
this morning. That is sacred healing water as well. Please help yourself to that water and we will be distributing that water to you as well. So, also, that water, that cleansing that we spoke about those tears, that water is that medicine for us as well. So, thank you, Thelma, for that beautiful reminder.

Okay. So, I’m going to hand it over to Debbie Reid, our Executive Director. And, thank you so much.

**MS. DEBBIE REID:** Bonjour, Debbie Reid, (speaking in Native language), I’m a member of the Skownan First Nation. I’m a direct descendent of a signatory to Treaty 2. I am from the Wolf Clan and my traditional name is Dancing Shawl Woman. I’m from this territory and I would like to welcome you all.

I’d like to recognize Chief Meeches as part of the drum group; Grand Chief Dumas who is here; President Ford who is here. Each of them will be speaking to you this morning. And, we’re going to start with a prayer, an opening prayer from our Elder, Velma.

**ELDER VELMA ORMIS:** Thank you. (Speaking in Native language). Migwetch Manitou for this day, for all the people in this room. We ask Mishomis and Nokomis to be here with us, to guide us, to watch over us, to comfort the families, and we ask that in a good way from our hearts.
We give thanks for those four directions,
the four colours of people, the four sacred animals and
plants around that medicine wheel. We also thank Creator
for our family, our friends, our loved ones, and we ask for
that sharing and caring to come into each and every one of
us, to be kind to each other, to be respectful, to love
each other equally the way Creator would want us to, to be
honest and truthful, and have the humility and courage to
do that, and we ask that in a good way.

We ask for and give thanks for the support
workers so that they can watch over the families, for they
-- each and every one of them. We are thinking of their
loved ones, their daughters who were once their little
babies and grew up to be beautiful women, and we ask that
at some point, we ask that they come home in a good way.

*Migwetch.*

**MS. DEBBIE REID:** Thank you, Velma. I’d
like now to ask Annie to come up and light the *Qu’liq*.

**MS. ANNIE BOWKETT:** Good morning. It’s good
to be part in this Missing Woman and to be back to light
the *Qu’liq* to remember for those missing persons. In my
traditional way, we have to use our *amauti*, like our
ancestors only used their *amauti*, and lighting their *Qu’liq*
and in front of their *Qu’liq*, they were always sitting in
the -- around the *Qu’liq* area, excuse me. So, I’ll be
lighting the Qu’liq very shortly.

Let us remember the people who are missing through our prayer. And, sometimes we often would say a lot of people committed suicide, maybe not, maybe they have been murdered, and partly to do with our -- my own people and your own people, and across Canada and everywhere around the world. And, it’s so sad. It is sad for their loved ones, for their little children. And, their babies, they’ll be growing up not knowing to learn about their parents. The only way we can do is pray to the Creator, and pray for everybody, and pray for all of us.

And, thank you so much. And, I’m very honoured to be part of this -- to light the Qu’liq and to remember my people and your people, and everyone here. And, thank you.

My own dialect, I lost my own dialect when I was so small. It’s so hard for me to get it back over the years, but I will say a prayer in my own dialect, if we can stand up to remember for all of us and everyone here? (Speaking in Native language). Thank you.

I don’t know how to use matches. One of my kids or my grandchildren have marked it as my (speaking in Native language). It’s called (speaking in Native language) to light the Qu’liq, and they put a marker on it. (Speaking in Native language). It takes a while. Our moms
used to be so patient, our people, lighting the Qu’liq. (Speaking in Native language).

I was in Iqaluit not too long ago and we usually go pick the wicks from the land. This is the kind of wick that we use, and this is the moss that we have to cut up with -- I brought my little ulu to cut it. It’s very sharp and made by men, and we have to cut this moss in order to go with the -- to go with the wick. And, I had a hard time looking for it and I had to ask one of my aunts when we were picking berries, where can I find this moss that you mix with the wick? We call it (speaking in Native language). And, as we were having tea, she showed me where it was and it was way under the ground that you -- it’s so hard to find.

It’s very traditional and you can’t really use the cotton wick by itself, you have to add it with the moss. And, I was so happy how she showed me where it was under the ground. They hide. So, my people long time ago used to go and pick those up, I remember, but I couldn’t remember which one was picked from inside the ground. So, I was very fortunate to bring it back to my hometown here, community. And so, I brought it with me. If anybody wants to ask or see it, you are more welcome.

The Qu’liq that I just lit, it kept us warm in igloo and our sod house, and the oil is usually be from
seal fat, but because I don’t have any, I had to use store bought and it’s almost the same. And, Qu’líq means living in a cold igloo or sod house all through the winter, all through the summer. Our parents kept us warm, and they would cook in it, and at night, they would turn it off and have one little tiny light on in the corner. And, they were so -- I thank you today that I survived. My mother taught me how to use the Qu’líq anywhere I go, anywhere I would live, or up to today, that she taught me how to light it. It’s not easy today to -- how to light it, but I thank you and thank you to all of you.

MS. DEBBIE REID: Thank you, Annie. I always love watching it get lit. I’m going to ask Commissioner Audette and Commissioner Eyolfson -- Annie, do you want to come back just for a sec? We’re going to give you something to recognize -- and Velma, if you would like to come up? Offering gifts of thanks to both of you. Go ahead. Thank you so much.

At this point, we would like to invite the North Eagle drum group to do two songs for us, an honour song, and I would like you all, please, to stand.

(MUSICAL PRESENTATION)

MR. MIKE MEECHES: We’ll sing a song. The next song is -- my grandmother used to hum to me when I was a baby, a young boy. I want to share that with you.
(MUSICAL PRESENTATION)

MS. DEBBIE REID: Chi migwetch. I also want to recognize Chaney. I met Chaney this morning when we were going to get some Fruit Loops. Chaney is in kindergarten and he got out of school to come here today. Chante, sorry. Now I got your name wrong. Now, he’s mad at me. Chante. All right. Thank you very much for the -- to the North Eagle drummers from Long Plain First Nation. And, Chante, have a good day at school.

Now, I would like to invite some of our dignitaries who are here to open and provide comments from Manitoba. So, first, I would like to invite Grand Chief Arlen Dumas to come and speak and open the ceremony. I just want to recognize that we have CBC Indigenous, CPAC, CTV Winnipeg and APTN who are live streaming this -- the hearings for this week. And, I also want to recognize that we actually do have a toll free support line. So, if you are watching this and you start to feel like you need to talk to somebody, we have the toll-free line. It’s 1-844-413-6649, and there are people who will speak in English, French, Cree, Ojibwe and Inuktitut. So, if you feel the need to call, if something you see here really upsets you, if you’re out there in TV land, please call, they’re there 24/7, okay? Grand Chief.

GRAND CHIEF ARLEN DUMAS: Thank you. I feel
like I’m on a late-night talk show host or something.  
(Speaking in Native language). I’d like to welcome the families and survivors, and the members of the National Inquiry to Treaty 1. I’m Arlen Dumas, Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. The AMC represents 63 First Nations in Manitoba. I would like to acknowledge the lands that we are on as the ancestral and sovereign lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Dakota and Oji-Cree nations.

Thank you for inviting me to provide some opening remarks at this stage of the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Since the last time I’ve made remarks to -- during the expert hearing on Indigenous laws and decolonization perspectives, you will have no doubt heard that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, the Southern Chiefs Organization, the Assembly of First Nations, Manitoba Regional Chiefs Office and the Province of Manitoba are all united and have the same position regarding the National Inquiry, that we all want to ensure that the families and survivors are the first priority in the inquiry process.

This was represented in the September 17th, 2017 joint statement that was sent to all the commissioners. While we have not received a response, we look forward to having one in the near future. The
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs does not speak for the families or the survivors, and that is why we do not have standing today in front of the inquiry. But, we do know that it’s going to be a very difficult time here. I hope that we have all the proper supports for the difficult work that’s about to begin.

You may have heard of all of the stories that have come out recently, out of Hollywood, around the movie mogul, Harvey Weinstein. It’s alleged that he has spent his whole career sexually harassing and assaulting young women. It has dominated the weekend’s news cycles. And, on Twitter, men have started to hashtag “#ibelieveyou”. Well, I believe you.

I believe the stories that are going to be shared here this week from the families and survivors, and it is my hope that together we can change what is happening in Canada to our sisters, mothers, daughters, aunties, grandmothers, nieces, cousins and friends. It’s up to all of us to stand together and protect our women and girls, so we won’t have another inquiry like this one. And, that we have to ensure that, you know, the police are properly investigated and that sexualized crimes against our women are looked at, and we also have to take a look at the abuses at the extractive industries due to our people and our women. (Speaking in Native language).
MS. DEBBIE REID: Chi migwetch. I’m just going to -- I’d like to now ask Hilda Anderson-Pyrz to come up on behalf of MKO and Grand Chief Sheila North Wilson.

MS. HILDA ANDERSON-PYRZ: Good morning, everybody. I just wanted to send a message on behalf of Grand Chief Sheila North Wilson who was unable to be here today because she had a loss in her family; her father passed away this weekend.

And, I just wanted to welcome everyone to Treaty 1 territory, in the homeland of the Métis. And, first and foremost, I wanted to welcome the families and the survivors, and the two-spirited who are here today with us in this room and who are watching across the country. Please know that Grand Chief Sheila North Wilson holds this issue very near and dear to her heart, and she has been really instrumental in creating a lot of awareness through the times that she was a journalist in the media, and she continues to champion the issue at various political levels, and she wants you to know that her support is behind each and every one of you 100 percent. And, if there is anything that she could do to assist families and survivors, she welcomes everybody to reach out to her.

My name is Hilda Anderson-Pyrz obviously, and I’m from the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation from Northern Manitoba, and I also wanted to share that I feel it’s...
important for the National Inquiry to travel up to
Thompson, Manitoba, which is the hub of the north, because
MKO represents 30 different First Nations in Northern
Manitoba, which many of them are remote, isolated First
Nations. So, I feel it’s important for those families and
survivors to have that opportunity to speak at a hearing
such as this with -- you know, in conjunction with
statement takers.

And, I also wanted to say thank you for the
beautiful ceremony this morning, and I know the days ahead
for the survivors, and the families and our two-spirited
sisters are going to be very difficult. And, you know,
it’s my hope that -- you know, you’re the voice of your
loved one, and as survivors, you’re here to share your
story to create that change, you know? Because as
Indigenous women and girls, we have the right to live and
we have the right to feel safe as well. So, it’s my hope
amidst all the chaos, you know, that’s happened with the
inquiry that this creates meaningful change for all of us.
Thank you.

MS. DEBBIE REID: Migwetch, Hilda. Thank
you, everyone. Now, I’d like to invite Regional Chief
Kevin Hart from the Assembly of First Nations.

REGIONAL CHIEF KEVIN HART: (Speaking in
Native language). My relatives, first, what I want to do
is acknowledge the prayers and the ceremony that was done this morning with the pipe. We had our drums there, as well as our Elders, and we had a water ceremony. I want to welcome everybody to Treaty 1 territory, as well as to thank the drum group, and Chief Dennis Meeches and the brothers that are around that drum. It’s always good to see you all. You know, Brother Dennis, we’ve been many, many trails together, as well as the brothers around this drum.

My friends and relatives this morning, my hearts go out to you this morning. We’re here for a very important week that we have ahead of us here, and I ask for everybody that’s out there, and for the ones that could see us on social media and various links, please send your prayers for the families, as they need them so dearly this week to find the courage to share their stories, and for the survivors as well to come forward and share their stories, and for the two-spirited to come forward as well to share their stories of such a national tragedy that has affected so many.

And, when I left my home community this morning, on my way, I thought of those families that have been affected, and there’s 14 families and 12 cold cases from my wife’s community of Sagkeeng, and my hearts go out to those families. And, I have so many people that I know
that I could see in this room, that -- you know, our communities are so small. There’s more than two degrees of separation here when I look into the crowd, you know, and my heart goes out to you all because I know that you’re -- I’m here to stand with you as one of the leaders to just be here with you, to listen and to try and understand.

But, for a lot of us also as leaders, you know, we’re affected by this too, and yet, we still have this job that we have to do. And, for myself right now, and a lot of people don’t know this, that our Grand Chief Arlen Dumas comes from the community Pukatawagan, and his community has been affected. And, most importantly right now, one of our relatives is missing right now that they’re looking for back home in the community of Pukatawagan. And, by extension, that’s one of my relatives from the Hart family that’s missing right now that they’re searching for.

So, my prayers go out to them. But, most importantly, my prayers go out to all those other families that are out there searching for their missing loved ones because they still haven’t given up hope. You know, I’ve seen one of my colleagues, one of my brothers, Paul Daniels from Sagkeeng here. We worked together in Addictions for many, many years, and I know that his family is here as well, because they have been affected by this national tragedy. And, my hearts go out to the Daniels and the
Winning family, as I know that they’re here as well to share their stories. And, I could see everybody here, the Abraham family, the McPherson family, and others. I’m here to stand with you, not as the Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. I’m here to stand with you as your brother first and foremost. That’s the way I see it.

You know, titles aside, we’re all here as family to support one another, and that’s where it is first and foremost that we put all our differences aside because this is all bigger than all of us. We have to be here for these families. We have to hug them. We have to love them. We have to give them our prayers, and by that, you know, Commissioners, we welcome you into our territory. We know it hasn’t been an easy job for you, and you know for me, as the Regional Chief, I’ve asked you those tough questions at the national table because I have a job to do as well for these families and for the leaders. And, I thank you and I welcome you into the territory, and I ask you from the bottom of my heart, please help the families and the survivors, and the two-spirited because they need us more than ever right now.

And for everybody else, the Elders and everybody in the room, I thank you for being here. I lift you all up. And for everybody else that’s at home that’s watching, please send your love and your prayers to these
people as they need them more than ever right now. Let’s not forget those spirits that are still missing, that are trying to make their way home, that we make sure we light those fires so that they can find their way home, and that the families find some closure and some peace in their hearts. So, we have to remember that our ceremonies and our prayers are so strong. We have to keep doing that so that these families can find some closure and some healing.

So, with that, I send my love out to all of you. I lift you all out and I honour you all for having the courage to be here today. And, I thank everybody else, as well as the staff and the Elders, and everybody around that’s here today. I thank my colleagues and the leadership that are in the room as well for being here. So, with that, (speaking in Native language). Thank you.

MS. DEBBIE REID: Thank you again. I’d now like to invite President Fred Ford from the Manitoba Inuit Association. President Ford, welcome.

PRESIDENT FRED FORD: Thank you very much. On behalf of the Manitoba Inuit Association, we would like to acknowledge that we’re here on Treaty 1 land, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe and the Oji-Cree, and the homeland of the Manitoba Métis, and to also acknowledge that it’s becoming a growing community of Inuit who have chosen to make Manitoba their home.
(Speaking in Native language). Good morning and welcome. My name is Fred Ford. And, again, I welcome, the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Women and Indigenous Girls here to Winnipeg to undertake this important work at the Commission. To all of the commissioners and to all of the community leaders, the Chiefs, Elders, to the family counsellors, advisors, and especially to all of the families, those with us today and those who are unable to be with us, Manitoba Inuit Association wish you well going forward with this important work.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank those helpers who lit and cared for the sacred fire this morning at the Oodena Circle, and continue to watch it, and to Annie for lighting our beautiful Qu’liq and tending it so carefully today. And, we acknowledge and thank all of you who have offered prayers today, and these beautiful songs and honour songs today and throughout the week. Thank you very much. We wish the Commission all of the best going forward. Thank you for allowing us to be here today.

MS. DEBBIE REID: So, I’d now like to invite Commissioner Brian Eyolfson to do some opening comments on behalf of the Commission.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Thank you,
Debbie. My name is Brian Eyolfson and I’m one of the commissioners with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I’m very pleased to introduce my fellow commissioner, Commissioner Audette, who is here with me this morning.

And, I want to start by acknowledging the spirits of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and transgendered, and two-spirited persons. It’s their memories that guides our work every day.

We’re gathered here on Treaty 1 territory, and as a visitor here, I need to acknowledge the original inhabitants of the land, Anishinaabe, and the homeland of the Métis. We started this week in a good way, early this morning, with the sunrise ceremony and the lighting of the sacred fire. I want to give a special thanks to those fire keepers who will be at the sacred fire throughout the week and at the Oodena Circle.

And, I also want to say it’s so encouraging to see so many families and survivors here today. I want to thank you for the trust that you’ve put into the National Inquiry. It’s your truths that carry this process forward.

I wanted to mention that Chief Commissioner Marion Buller will join us this Wednesday. She had a previous commitment where she was invited to the Tribal
Chief Child and Family Services to speak at a women’s conference. Commissioner Qajaq Robinson is preparing for upcoming community hearings and wants each of you here today to know her thoughts are with you.

I also want to recognize the Manitoba leaders and the families who have been strong advocates for Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people. Thank you.

We remain committed to the families, survivors and loved ones of the heart, and we’re going to listen carefully to the truths that each of you bring to share with us this week.

And, we’ve also heard the advice that’s been given to, us which is why you have a choice on how you want to share your stories with us this week, whether that’s here in a public community hearing, or with a statement gatherer, or perhaps in one of our sharing circles, or in a private setting for those who may continue to fear violence, or through one of the artistic expression panels.

So, finally, to those of you watching on the live feed or on our Facebook page, or on any of the other major media websites, thank you for joining us. And, to all Canadians, I want to acknowledge your place as we move forward together in a good way. Together we will hear how to make life better and safer for all Indigenous women,
Opening Remarks

MS. DEBBIE REID: Migwetch, Commissioner. I would now like to invite Commissioner Audette to come up and make some opening comments.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Thank you very much, Madam Director General. (Speaking in Native language). Thank you very much. And, a special thank you for everybody who is here today and for being here today. And, I would also like to pay a special homage to people who are listening to us throughout Canada. This is an extremely important week. It’s a very emotional week. It’s a very important week and a very emotional week, so we have to listen to each family who will share their truths with us. And, now in English.

Good morning, everyone. I am Michèle Audette. I’m from the Innu Nation and Quebecois, my dad is Quebecois, and a proud mother of five beautiful children. And, in those five children, there are two girls. And, like many of us here in this room, as a parent, we want to make sure that our daughters are not a stolen sister or somebody that we lost. So, we all have this in our heart every day, every day.

But, before I say my opening remarks, I have to say thank you for the people of this land that are welcoming us and very honoured to be welcomed by the people
of Rosen First Nation River this weekend, where they fed us, they make us dance and sang, that -- I didn’t do it, and ate for all of you. I’m full. It was very, very beautiful. It was a ceremony that, for me as an Innu woman, I never saw before, so my heart, my spirit was very, very open and glad to witness this.

We have ways to do things, and every time I go to a hearing, it’s always important for me that I have an Elder, a woman from this land, so I asked this morning with tobacco, of course, if Thelma would do the honour to sit with me when we’re listening the truth of the families and survivors, and I’m so honoured that she said yes.

 Merci beaucoup. And, she will be also helping other families in another room, so you will see other Elders all week sitting beside us. Elders from this land. Very, very important. And, I want to acknowledge my grandmother,

because I speak French and English, I have two grandmothers.

So, my BC, who speaks English, grandmother, Bernie Williams, thank you for being here and reminding me why we’re doing this when I’m going off the road or the path. It doesn’t happen often, because I take this very, very, very seriously because it’s important. Very important. And, I want to acknowledge and say thank you to the Grand Chief who spoken, and of course, Grand Chief
Sheila, our heart is with you. We found out yesterday that you lost your dad, so our heart is with you.

And, my dream this week is that we put politics aside, that we put all the mistakes or the great stuff that we did on this side, or choose your side about where we should put it, that while we’re here today as human beings, with titles maybe, okay, on paper, but as human beings, there’s never nothing for nothing.

There are families who took the courage, the passion or the stress or -- I don’t know how they feel, but they’re here today and they’ll be here all week. But, we have to remember that there’s thousands of thousands of other families who don’t have that courage to come in public, to come and share their truth. So, every day we have to pray for them, we have to lift them, we have to walk beside them and this is what we do as human beings.

And, if it’s possible for you, family members and survivors, only if you want, if you can stand up, I know you’re in the room, so I can acknowledge you, we can acknowledge your presence here and your courage and resilience. If you can stand up? Merci.

For those who are listening at home, you have all our love. If a hearing is too much for you, if to speak in public is too much for you, we have ways to reach you and to be with you in your kitchen, living room or in a
place where you think it’s safe, where we will listen to
your truth. Your truth. And, our dream, the
Commissioners, but the human being like I said first, is to
honour that truth, to respect that truth, and of course, to
give life to that truth. And, we will be travelling across
Canada, they call it Canada. We will be travelling, and
each time that we will leave a place, your spirit is in our
heart. Believe me, I’m sincere. I love you all, thank you
so much for being here.

MS. DEBBIE REID: Migwetch. (indiscernible)
and pick up the headsets and hear simultaneous translation.
Simultaneous. Hard for me to say this in French. And, if
at any time Commissioner Audette or others speak French and
you would like a translation, in that box right by the
translation services are headsets, 1 for English -- okay.
2 for English. So, if you need translation services, you
can grab those headsets at the back. It just reminded me
when Michèle was speaking en Français.

I’d like now to invite our Director of
Research, who is going to be leaving us soon to go to her
cool new job at the University of Ottawa. Aimee Craft is
coming to talk to you about some of the cultural symbols
that we have and that will be here for the remainder of the
hearings, because part of what we believe is very
important. There’s also education and educating on

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cultural symbols and others for those who may not be necessarily aware. So, Aimee, please.

**MS. AIMEE CRAFT:** Thanks, Debbie. (Speaking in Native language). I don’t want to stand in front of anyone and it’s hard in this room, so I’m going to walk -- I’ll walk around a little bit because I’m going to share a few things. Many of you don’t need explanation of these items, and they’re not just cultural symbols, but also some of our sacred items. So, I want to acknowledge what’s already been said about this drum, the Qu’liq that was lit, the water that’s there, and the pipes that were lifted this morning in the sunrise and opening ceremony.

There are four things that I’d like to share today and that’s part of making everybody comfortable in this space, and knowing that everybody has their place and that they’re represented and what’s in front of you, and that these things are here to help you.

So, I’ll start with these blankets that are behind me, and they’re in each of the rooms that we’ll be in over the next week. And, these blankets were made by family members and survivors and women in institutions in Saskatchewan. And, in every hearing that we attend, more of these squares are made by family members and children. Anyone who wants to participate and create a square with a message, or an intention or to express themselves through
that, there are squares in the Family Room that you can make. They’ll be then put together in these blankets and gifted to families at the end of the Inquiry’s work. And, these travel with the Commissioners as they do their work. So, that’s an opportunity that you have while you’re here. If you need to put your intentions into those squares, please do that.

We also have an opportunity to provide artistic expression. So, whatever that might be for you, if it’s a song, or a poem, or a painting or anything that you would like to share with the Inquiry. Even if you’re not coming to sit up here and speaking to a Commissioner directly, that you have that opportunity to share some of your work, some of your thought and intention through those things that you’ll be gifting to the Inquiry in that way. And, those are going to be held in what’s called a legacy archive, but making sure that people have access to that, so that people can see what it is that you’re putting forward in your art and your expression in that way.

There are a couple of other things that I would like to share, and they’re -- on these banners, and you’ll see some of these banners a little bit all over the place, including at registration downstairs and up in the room here, and they explain some of the objects that travel with the Inquiry.
So, here right beside me is the Miskwaabimaag Basket. It’s a red willow basket that’s actually from here, this area, and women from our territory have made it. We harvested this red willow near Bannock Point, many of you will be familiar with that area, and created this basket as a symbol of gathering truth. Not telling truth or finding truth, but the opportunity to gather. And, we know that many Indigenous people around the world, and here, are really important gatherers of many things, and that this inquiry has this important task of helping to gather that truth as it travels.

So, this is a basket that was gifted to the Inquiry by Anishinaabekwe from this region. And, beside it, it’s a cup of -- a copper cup with water, and the lining of red cloth is to protect that work. So, if you do have something at some point that you want to put in this basket, we had amazing young people in Smithers come and share their intentions and place their thoughts and aspirations into that basket to share with the National Inquiry, and that’s really important to the work that’s being done. There’s an explanation of that in French here, but there’s another banner downstairs that has the explanation in English, if anyone is interested in more detail.

The last -- the fourth thing that I wanted
to speak on is the seed packets. And, for those of you who will be coming to provide testimony, to share stories with the Commissioners, you’ll be gifted a packet of seeds. And, these are seeds that grow in our region, and we do this wherever we travel in Canada, is seeds that will grow and they’re appropriate to that particular region. So, here, this is wild strawberry and that is a really good heart medicine, but also good for us as we can plant these seeds and harvest them and continue the relationship.

So, the invitation is extended to anyone who wants to continue the relationship, to plant these seeds, and to continue to share their stories with the National Inquiry and with each other about how that work of planting these seeds, of harvesting and being in connection, and also commemorating loved ones through the act of growing and giving life through these very important medicine plants.

You’ll also, as family members that are testifying, be gifted these eagle feathers, and these are harvested on Haida Gwaii, and were brought to the gathering in Smithers. And, what’s happened -- people have heard about this and been adding feathers and giving feathers, so that they can be shared with the family members that are coming to share their stories with the National Inquiry. So, it’s a really beautiful way of honouring that truth.
that’s being shared and each person that’s coming to share their story in the National Inquiry. So, I want to acknowledge those who started this and those who are contributing to it, and the important work that these will do in helping to share that truth.

So, there are also some other items that are here, that have been gifted to the Inquiry, and this is your space. So, if anyone wants to, on a break, come and acknowledge the drum, to see what is here, to add to it, there’s ways of doing that, and we wanted to share a bit of that as we start so that everyone is comfortable with what’s in this space. So, with that, I say migwetch.

**MS. DEBBIE REID:** Migwetch. So, we’re going to start with our closing song from the drum group, the North Eagle drum group. Just before we do, I would like to announce that after the song is finished, we’re going to take about a 10 minute break to get organized for the first family to come and sit with the Commissioners. There’s refreshments available at the back.

When the families are providing their stories, we ask that cell phones be turned off or put on silent, please, so that there is no interruptions when the families are speaking. Okay. So, after the drum is finished, we’ll take a 10 minute break to prepare for the first family.
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Hello. Hi.
Commissioner Audette, I would like to call the next family, Joan Winning, Isabel Winning and Stephanie Daniels. Today, Joan, Isabel and Stephanie will be sharing their story of their granddaughter and niece, Nicole Ashley Daniels. The family has asked Paul Daniels to start with a prayer, and so I would like to take the microphone to Mr. Daniels.

MR. PAUL DANIELS: (Speaking in Native language). She’s strong, but this needs more than strength, the things that we go through. I, as an addictions counsellor, as Kevin mentioned this morning, I’ve had a lot of experience with this type of tragedies that we’re talking about today, that is why we need special help and that is why I’m asking. (Speaking in Native language).
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Migwetch. Mr. Registrar, I’d ask that you take the Statement of Truth from our witnesses.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Good morning to all three of you. Do you promise to share your truth this morning with the Commissioner and with everybody here?

MS. JOAN WINNING: Yes, I do.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Okay. Thanks so much.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Commissioner Audette, I’m actually asking the family that’s sitting in support in front of our three participants here just to introduce themselves briefly and tell you how they’re related to Nicole Daniels.

MS. DAPHNE: My name is Daphne and she’s my cousin.

MS. ANGIE: Good morning, I’m Angie, and I’m here as a support for the family.

MS. ALESHA: I’m Alesha and I’m the sister of Nicole.

MR. PAUL DANIELS: My name is Paul, Paul Daniels. I guess I’m the elder of the family. I’m the oldest of the family. And, I’m here, as I said before, to offer support, whatever I can in prayer. I go to sweats almost every night hoping to help my siblings to deal with this. And, I realize, you know, that it’s just not us that
are dealing with this; it’s all of us across Canada that are dealing with strife like this. And, I hope and pray that out of this, good will come for women, where sisters or moms -- my mom passed away long time ago. She was a very strong woman, and I remember her all the time, especially with the way things are going right now. We need her strength, all of us, and her courage. She was a very courageous woman. Migwetch.

MR. ROB DANIELS: My name is Rob Daniels, Nicole was my cousin.

MS. CHERYL BLACKSMITH: Good morning. My name is Cheryl Blacksmith. Nicole was my cousin. And, my father was the oldest of the family, and he passed away not ever seeing what’s to come of the inquiry. And so, I’m my father’s oldest. And so, I’m here representing my family, which is the Daniels family as well. And I say migwetch.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Commissioner Audette, the family has also asked to have cousin Robert perform a song, and I welcome Robert to share, if he’d like to, what he’s singing about, and it’s in honour of Nicole.

MR. ROBERT: Hello. My mom asked me to write this song for this occasion. So, this song is for or about or inspired by my cousin, Nicole, and I hope it helps you find some healing with what you may be going through as well.
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you, Robert.

So, Joan, can I ask you a couple of questions in relation to Nicole’s mom and why you felt that you had to share Nicole’s story today?

MS. JOAN WINNING: The way Nicole was found was -- she was found frozen behind a dark -- like, there was no light switch that was found. It was dark. And, circumstances leading to her death were, I believe, the actions of this one person. The autopsy said that she froze to death, but there was (indiscernible) that led to her freezing.

I’m just going to make this a little shorter and say that her mother -- I’ll go on later on to what I’m going to say. Her mom fought -- she was phoning the police all the time to get answers, and they told her it was closed because she froze to death. But, we believe that she didn’t just freeze to death; there was circumstances leading to that.

Her mom went into a deep depression -- I’m sorry, my mouth is dry -- after that and she never got over it. But, the reason I am sitting here today is because I want to pick up the fight where my sister left off. I don’t want Nicole to -- Nicole’s death to be in vain. I don’t want it to be just swept under the rug, which is what
they were trying to do since 2009 and I’m hoping to get to
tell Nicole’s story so people know -- are aware that she
wasn’t just a statistic. She came from a good family. She
was loved by everybody. I guess that’s it for now. Thank
you.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Isabel, can you
share some of Nicole’s strengths and contributions to the
family with the Commissioner?

MS. ISABEL WINNING: (Speaking in Native
language). I just wanted to touch on some of Nicole’s
talents. She had a great knack for it. She was a
storyteller. She was always making short stories, and she
had a love for music. She was very artistic, as her sister
will explain later in her testimony. She will explain some
of her drawings and -- oh, there’s someone there. Just
some of her early talents when she was younger.

I would like to emphasize that if she was
still on this earth and if she was still with us, then her
talents could have flourished into something else and she
could have been, you know, an artist today. So, I believe
that she obviously was cut short of her life, but also her
talents were cut short. She was never able to reach her
full potential as -- in terms of her talents because of the
actions of this person.

She had a love for all of her siblings. She
Joan Winning, Isabel Winning & Stephanie Daniels
(Nicole Ashley Daniels)

was the oldest of six, so I think in that light she was her mom’s first born daughter. She had a love for music as well. Ever since she was a baby, I don’t even know, I think she was walking at nine months. Sorry, I was going to say 11, but that was my daughter. But, she was walking when she was around nine months old. She was talking. She was already singing the alphabet and the whole Barney song before she was 1, so she was incredibly smart. That’s all I have to say for now.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And so, if we can just take a step back and maybe talk about -- if you could share the events that led to Nicole freezing? And, I know that this is difficult and please take your time.

MS. JOAN WINNING: She had been talking to this person on a chat line. I guess it was 2009, so they didn’t have -- I don’t know if she was on Facebook or not. Was she? Telephone hotline. Where she met this person, this older person I guess, who took advantage of a young girl who was living in poverty and anyway. She went to meet him that night.

So, this is, like, 10:00 at night, and they found her at 8:00 in the morning. So, it was only a few hours since the time that she had left home. As I said earlier, they found her face down with her clothes undone. The autopsy says that she tried to -- it was viewed
paradoxal, undressing due to freezing. But, that’s an assumption. They don’t know because they weren’t there.

I believe that the person that took her that night supplied her with so much alcohol in her system that she was barely able to walk. She lived, like, two short blocks away from where she was found and she would have made her way home had she not been supplied with so much alcohol that she couldn’t walk. I believe that when he was finished with her, that he just -- sorry, I want to start again.

I think that when he finished with her, he tossed her out of his truck or pulled her out of his truck and just left her there because she had bruises on her arms that we seen when she was in her casket, and she didn’t have those bruises before. She had bruises on her legs, like she had been assaulted. She had bruises on her face, which they said was because she was laying face down, but she wasn’t -- like I said, from 10:00 to 8:00 in the morning, that’s not even 12 hours.

The police closed the file because the autopsy report said that she froze to death. I think it was just easier for them to close it rather than investigate further. They went and spoke to a couple of family members the first couple of days of her death, but that’s the only investigating that they did.
The person that was involved in this, they had the name, this person. He wasn’t charged with anything. She was 16 years old, barely out of 15. Her birthday was in February and this was April the 1st. She had just turned 16 years old. This guy supplied her with so much alcohol and maybe supplied her with pills as well, because she had some kind of pill in her system, maybe to make her get drunk faster, I’m not sure. But, at the very least, why wasn’t he charged with contributing to a minor?

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So, I just want to get this right. You keep referring to an older gentleman who actually picked Nicole up in the evening after 10:00. And, you don’t know anything about this individual? You’ve said “they know”, and when you say “they”, do you mean the police knew, but you don’t know who he is?

**MS. JOAN WINNING:** Yes, the police knew who this person was. They did talk to him. I don’t know what the results were of that conversation. They told my sister that they spoke to this person. My sister believed that he lived in Transcona, an older gentleman in his 40s. So, he has gone on to live his life. He’s probably a grandpa by now. My niece -- I forgot. She was also my godchild and she -- she didn’t have a chance to live. She didn’t have a chance at life. She might have had a -- she might have been finished school, she might have had a baby by now, but
she was robbed of that life by this person, because of his selfish act. My sister also lost her life. So, because of this one person, there’s two family members missing in our family.

My sister’s children have no mother. The youngest is 8 years old and the oldest is 23. All because of this one person. Why isn’t there any -- like, why -- why didn’t they go any further? I’m sitting here because I want the police to at least reopen the case and go further into what happened that night, because she did not just freeze to death. There was other circumstances that led to it.

And, it’s not that he only got her drunk, but he -- he -- there may have been no evidence in the autopsy about her -- about the sexual assault, but maybe because she was so drunk and her body was relaxed that there was no bruises on her body regarding the sexual act itself. But, he should be charged with that as well, because that was his sole purpose that night of meeting a 16-year-old girl, was to get her drunk and have his way with her, then dispose of her, you know?

Because that’s what he did. He just -- he flung her out of his truck and just left her there to fend for herself in the condition that she was in, knowing that she couldn’t stand up and make her way home.
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Isabel, we’ve heard Joan explain one of her theories. One of the questions we were talking about at one point was -- you know, is it possible that she was trying to refuse his advances and just got out of the car? But, what do you think or how do you feel about the fact that an adult took your 16-year-old cousin and -- sorry, 16-year-old niece and didn’t make sure she got back home?

MS. ISABEL WINNING: I’d like to say, first of all, that I think that it goes without saying, when you hear about cases like this, that it goes to show what society thinks of our women. It goes to show the magnitude of how they think that our lives don’t matter, that when you pick up a 16-year-old at 10:00 at night, and you’re in your mid 40s, probably leaving your wife at home.

I think that when he picked her up -- and I think she had a stamp on her hand as well, so they did go to a club. I think that either maybe he didn’t get what he wanted or maybe she did refuse his services, to which point when he did dispose of her body, I think that he knew full well that she probably wasn’t going to make it home. I think that he knew that when he drove away. Did he even look back to see if she was still walking? Did he even look back to see if she -- if she had fallen? Did he look back to see if she had gotten up?
So, it was a complete disregard of her life and I think that his actions directly correlated with her death. He had to have known when she got out of that truck, or when he threw her out, or when he pushed her out that she wasn’t getting up from where she was. From details in the autopsy report, it looks like she literally just didn’t get back up from the first initial -- from getting out of his car.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** May I ask you -- actually, you keep referring to a document. You’re referring to the autopsy report. So, the family did have the opportunity to receive an autopsy report form. Yes. Commissioner Audette, I’m going to ask that a document be entered, parties withstanding will receive a copy, but because of the nature of the document, to protect the integrity and dignity of Nicole, we’re going to ask that it be sealed. So, I ask Commissioner Audette that you order the document be sealed.

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Yes, we do have this document and we will make sure that it will be sealed.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So, Michèle has ordered the document. I am going to just ask that you look at the summary. And, this is the portion that I’m going to ask be read in. So, if you just want to read the first
MS. ISABEL WINNING: “This was the case of a 16-year-old girl who was found laying down, face down, outdoors in the snow. Her jacket was off and her blouse is undone. She had a history of drug and alcohol abuse, and a previous suicide attempt.” Again, those are assumptions made by the Winnipeg Police and the coroner.

“When last seen, she was apparently going drinking and may have been under the influence of benzodiazepines, which she would have taken from her mother.” Again, another assumption; how do they know that?

“Autopsy showed minor abrasions and contusions to the body and superficial gastric erosion. Her jacket had been removed and her blouse was undone, suggesting paradoxal undressing due to hypothermia.”

Again, they don’t -- another assumption. They don’t know that he didn’t tear her clothes off.

“Toxicology and alcohol testing showed an acute alcohol intoxication and the presence of benzodiazepine in her system.”

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And, I just wanted to ask a question, because I know the family feels very strongly and you actually already, as you were reading it in, pointed out that there’s a number of assumptions happening here, particularly that she had a history of
alcohol.

She was 16. Did she have a history of alcohol that you’re aware of, and if so, can you explain a little more?

**MS. ISABEL WINNING:** I don’t know how anybody at 16 has a history of drug and alcohol abuse. As we talked earlier, we talked about the alcohol content that was in her body, and for someone who was addicted to alcohol or benzodiazepines, the alcohol limit that was in her system wouldn’t have been enough to incapacitate her to the point where she couldn’t get up from where she stood, which to us suggests that she wasn’t an experienced drinker or someone who had alcohol issues.

I think that it was easy just for them to chop it up as an Aboriginal girl that lived in, you know, Manitoba Housing, and was the result of her own demise, which was not the case. That’s another reason why we have all these questions.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And, in terms of -- like, she was 16. Had she experimented or tried alcohol like a lot of teenagers, regardless of their racial background, would have?

**MS. STEPHANIE DANIELS:** For a 16-year-old girl, I would -- I would say that she stayed home a lot, she -- she was very closed off and sheltered and -- she
just stuck to her family most of the time. Like, for a 16-
year-old, they’re usually out partying, you know? She
wasn’t like that.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. And,
they make a reference to a previous suicide attempt. Do
any of you want to speak to that?

MS. STEPHANIE DANIELS: She wasn’t suicidal.

MS. JOAN WINNING: There was an incident
when she flew through this window. I don’t know if she was
fooling around or not, but the police were called and they
assumed that she was trying to commit suicide. She had a
little bit of scars on her arms. If she was intent on
committing suicide, she would have found a way to commit
suicide.

So, if -- maybe she had the ideation for
committing suicide, but she didn’t -- she wasn’t suicidal.
There’s a difference. I should know because I was a cutter
myself when I was that age. It’s looking for attention and
-- you know? Most -- I think there’s a lot of teenagers
that do that when they want attention.

But, that again is another assumption based
on what they think about Indigenous people or poor people
living in poverty and stuff like that, they’re all
alcoholics and suicidal. It’s not true of -- it wasn’t
true of Nicole. Nicole came from a very good family. I’m
sure there was a few setbacks with her mother with problems
with stuff like that, but she did come from a good family.
Otherwise, we wouldn’t be sitting here right now.

She wasn’t an alcoholic and she wasn’t
suicidal. Those are all assumptions that were made, and I
think this is a big problem with the system, as it is with
the police system, and even the toxicologist or pathologist
that made that autopsy report. They seem to be all
assumptions that are written in the autopsy report.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Thank you. You had
said something and I just -- I want to specify. You had
said, you know, sometimes Nicole’s mother wasn’t in a good
way. And, earlier, I think Isabel had said that one of the
things Nicole was, was this really good big sister -- like
a sister mom. Like, she helped take care of all the other
kids?

**MS. ISABEL WINNING:** Yes, she would. She
was always helping her mom out that way when she was the
oldest of six; right? So, this is a picture of the three
oldest, Alesha on the left, Stephanie in the middle and
Nicole is on the right in the pink shirt. I believe this
is in their house on Price. So, this is the house that
they lived in, in East Kildonan. The three of them, I
think -- I believe were so close. They were so close in
age, all three of them. And, another thing that he took is
he broke that bond between the three oldest siblings.

I’d just like to mention that even though we’re talking about that -- the assumptions of her alcohol use and her -- you know, about this assumption that she was, you know -- had issues with addiction and suicidal ideations, let’s not forget the fact that this person that took her out, picked her up from her home, he supplied her and made sure that she was in a state that she was incapacitated and wasn’t able to fend him off.

Regardless if she had issues with addition, regardless if she was suicidal, it doesn’t matter. The fact is that this guy took advantage of her. He took advantage of the fact that she was an Aboriginal girl. He took advantage of the fact that he was able to provide the means for her to not be able to fend off his actions.

And, I just -- sorry, I didn’t want to spend too much time focusing on the assumptions. I think that it gets clouded and I think people -- even people that are watching will also lead them to believe that maybe she was, you know, the result of her own demise and that’s not the case. The case is that this man picked her up, took her from his home -- her home, took her out to a club, and then took her in the back of an auto body shop where there was no lights, where there was no one to help her and disposed of her like she was garbage. Those facts still remain.
Those aren’t assumptions. Those are facts. Those are things that happened at night; those are things that happened to her.

And, I think a lot of ways that we get lost in media and stuff like that is by focusing on the troubles that we have as Aboriginal people, that are not just for Aboriginal people. Those problems exist worldwide. The problem is that we suffer as addicts -- I’m also a survivor as well. But, the problems that we suffer as addicts do not mean that -- warrant an early death sentence because of those actions or because we have faults and because we had made mistakes. This -- my niece -- my cousin, my niece was robbed of her life because this man knew of ways to take advantage. Who knows if he hasn’t done that already? Who knows if he still doesn’t prey on that same complex in Transcona because he’s gotten away with it? Who knows how many more victims that this guy may have?

But, to the Winnipeg Police, he is considered an upstanding citizen in our community and, well, what the hell was she? What was she to society? Nothing? Like the 1,200 other Aboriginal women that are murdered and missing? I think that’s bullshit. Sorry for my use of language. But, we need to get past these theories that -- and start focusing more on why these predators are picking our women. Why are we seen as such
Hearing – Public
Joan Winning, Isabel Winning
& Stephanie Daniels
(Nicole Ashley Daniels)

disposable beings in our society? It doesn’t matter what
class we sit in, it doesn’t matter if we’re living in
poverty, and it doesn’t matter if we’re sitting on
Parliament Hill. We’re still seen as disposable people in
our society and I think that’s the real thing that needs to
change here. Otherwise, there will be more cases like
Nicole. Thank you.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. Thank
you. Can I ask a question stemmed out of that? So, in
terms of accountability, how do we start -- or what’s a
recommendation to making people like this be more
accountable for some of their actions? And, I’m putting
this in the context of, you know, maybe somebody would say,
well, you can’t really prove he did anything, but what do
you think he should be responsible or accountable for in
this circumstance?

MS. ISABEL WINNING: I think that he should
be held accountable for a disregard of life. I don’t know
what the legal term for that charge would be. I think he
should be charged with supplying alcohol to a minor causing
death. I think that he should be charged with sexual
assault. I think that -- I don’t know what the legal term
would be for -- other than reckless endangerment of a life,
reckless endangerment of a child, child abuse. They said
that they didn’t charge or, you know -- and plus, she was
the legal age to consent. Even if you were 45, if you were in that state of mind, how can any woman consent to any kind of advance made by anybody, let alone a man twice your age?

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And, on that last point, and I just want to make sure that it’s the family’s position -- that it’s clear it’s the family’s position, particularly is it right -- and forget about legal terms, let’s just talk about people’s actions. People’s actions, is it fair to say the family believes that anyone who has this kind of behaviour towards a young person, that it should actually be looked at as child abuse when someone’s under 18, that it should look like it’s predatorial or someone intentionally trying to get a young person?

**MS. JOAN WINNING:** It is. He did -- he set out to -- he preyed on her, he preyed on because of the fact that she was -- she was living in poverty, so that was how he was able to entice her out of her home. He -- sorry, I’m getting lost here. Can you ask the question again?

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So, what is your position on any circumstance like this? And, as Isabel put it, whether or not she had any issues, what is your position on an adult picking up a young Indigenous woman who is 16 years old?
MS. JOAN WINNING: Well, he was -- he knew she was vulnerable, so he preyed on her. I think he should be charged with -- yes, that was child abuse. Like I said, she was barely out of 15 years old, two months after her birthday. Did he know that she was that young? No, she had no ID on her. And, yet he took her to a bar. Now, I’m thinking, was that bar for certain members who did the same thing, you know, where they all preyed on young girls like this and had this exclusive club to take them there? She didn’t look old enough to go to the bar, you know? Like, it’s -- like, the residential school system on the -- they abused these -- the students. It’s -- I could say maybe it’s the same thing, because he knew she was a -- yes, he needs to be charged with child abuse, that’s what I would say, because she was a child. Would he want that same thing to happen to his children? His children at the time were probably older than her, and yet, he could go and pick up a 15-year-old girl and -- supplied her with alcohol and pills, and dispose of her.

Why wasn’t he charged with that? That’s what I can’t understand. Does he know that he destroyed a whole family? He devastated a whole family? We’re still feeling the pain today because of the actions of this one person, a selfish act to satisfy his -- himself.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: We’re going to go
through some pictures and have the family just give some descriptions, but before that, I want to ask the family if they have any recommendations or ideas that they want to share with the Commission? I think we’ve actually heard the family say pretty strong and loud that there are certain things that have to stop being tolerated, that women need to -- Indigenous women need to be seen as victims and not disposable, but I want to ask the family if they had any other ideas or recommendations that they wanted to share with the Commission?

**MS. ISABEL WINNING:** Other than seeing actions in terms of -- or things that we would like to see change with this predator, I think that we need to change in how we engage with Winnipeg Police. It’s obviously apparent that there’s a complete disconnect between law enforcement and Aboriginal people. There’s a complete distrust in terms of Aboriginal people not trusting Winnipeg Police, in terms of the way that they conduct themselves and the language that they use when they’re addressing families of murdered and missing women.

I think that their assumptions in terms of the outcome of these cases is horrendous. For example, my -- I had to call in, my daughter went missing, but the way that I was treated when I called the police is that it was my fault and that if I wasn’t -- if I was a better parent,
if I knew every single nook and cranny that my daughter was in when she left the house, then I wouldn’t be in the situation that I was in, that I wouldn’t be sitting here crying to the Winnipeg Police about the location of my daughter.

And, what kind of approach is that when you’re -- you know, I was lucky that my daughter came home, but in cases like Nicole and the 1,200 cases where these girls didn’t come home, you walk into any -- you walk and barge your way into the homes of these people who are obviously broken, and you treat them like they’re dirt, and that simply being, you know, an Aboriginal person is -- you know, well, there you go right there, you know, it’s those Aboriginal people. And, you know, there you go right there, they’re Manitoba Housing or on EIA or -- just the way that the Winnipeg Police and law enforcement take a look at Aboriginal people, I think that needs to change.

I don’t know how they’re going to do it at the level of law enforcement. Maybe we need to bring these people to ceremony. Maybe we need to take them out of their uniforms and bring them to ceremony to see what we as Aboriginal women are. We’re not -- you know, whatever they have in their mind about Aboriginal women. But, maybe we need to bring them to ceremony and give them another view of us as people, instead of always, you know, the
interaction that they have with us in terms of them doing
their job and us trying to get advocacy for our loved ones.

And, we’ll never be on the same page until
we come to a common ground and maybe that common ground is
at ceremony. I don't know. But, I think that if we don’t
change the mindset of Winnipeg Police, then a lot of these
cases will again fall on deaf ears.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Can I ask that the
pictures, starting with the artwork, come up onto the
screen, please? Stephanie, can you tell me a little bit
about how important artwork was for Nicole and what she did
exactly? Because I know we’ve only got a few pictures up
here, but if you could explain that, that would be helpful.

MS. STEPHANIE DANIELS: I think that she
expressed some of her feeling in her art. She would --
well, me and my sister, when we were younger, she -- her
room is right beside our room, so her door would be shut
and we would hear her talking and telling stories. So,
with her art -- she never wrote them down, but she told
stories with her art, that’s why there’s, like, scenarios
in some of her pictures. Yes. Sometimes when we were,
like, young, young, me and my sister, she -- she would make
us sit in a particular position and pose, and she would
sketch us out and it would take at least an hour. I was
always satisfied with the results of them.
I don’t know. It’s too bad that she never
got the chance to see her true potential with it, because
again, she was only 16 with these drawings and younger
even.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. Can I
ask that the pictures be brought up as well? And, any of
the family members just -- I know that Isabel already
explained at least one picture, but if we can get the
pictures up and someone in the family can tell us a little
bit about what we’re looking at or the timeframe we’re
looking at after the Pikachu?

MS. STEPHANIE DANIELS: I remember when the
whole Pokémon thing was popular in my neighbourhood, and I
guess I requested that she drew them -- all the Pokémons
for me. I didn’t take pictures, but we have a few more. I
think we have Squirtle too, but I remember being so proud
and going around the neighbourhood and showing them off to
other kids. We don’t have much of her art, but that’s a
few of what we have and we’re lucky to even have them
still.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: I bet they’re very
treasured in your household. And, if we could just get the
photos up as well? I don’t know if someone wants to tell
us a little bit about the pictures as we’re seeing them?

MS. JOAN WINNING: She had just turned a
year old here. She was already walking and singing. Like I said, she was really smart. Nicole was born to the youngest of our family, Fran -- Frances. So, we didn’t think that Fran was going to have any babies and when she had Nicole, the whole family was so happy that our baby sister had a baby. So, she was loved by everybody. She was treasured by the whole family, which is why it was such a devastating loss for the whole family when she passed.

This is -- here, she’s looking at my little grandson that was born that time. He was only a couple of days old and she was wanting to hold him. And, here, they’re having breakfast. And, I lived with them off and on through the years, so I was very close to all the kids and I’m raising -- they’re all living with me right now.

This is at her baptismal. That’s my son, Philip, and we’re the godparents of Nicole. This is her -- she’s putting her shoes on, waiting for my grandma to come and -- I mean, my mom to come and give her a little ice cream. She used to drop by and give her a little treat of -- those little Dixie cup ice creams, which is her favourite, but they were so small. There was never quite enough there for her. Her parents are here at a baptism.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. Well, I just want to let the family, if they have anything else they wanted to add before Commissioner Audette may have a
MR. PAUL DANIELS: Can you ask for the picture there, where she’s looking up?

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Can we put -- stop and hold the picture where she’s looking up, please?

Sorry, not this one, but where she was kind of looking at a baby, another baby, but all you could see was her face looking up. There we go.

MR. PAUL DANIELS: See, this is a picture of a girl that was really loved -- loved by everybody in our family, and you can see it in her eyes there. You know, as I listen here today and I feel that she’s on trial, why is that? Why do I feel that? Is she on trial?

And, the other thing I have to say, you asked if we have any suggestions. Well, I do have a suggestion. You know, society has to look at us as the same way that they look at themselves. I mean, the way the white people look at themselves, you know? That’s all we ask for, and to be treated the same, you know, in terms of justice.

These young women, you know, that’s what they are. They deserve life. They deserve the same opportunity as anybody else. They’re intelligent and they can succeed in life.

When I talked about my mom earlier, you
know, and Angie talks about our family being a good family, well, it’s true, you know? My sons all have university degrees, they all work, you know? And, that’s something that we try to give to our family members, inspire the way our mom was. My mom raised 15 children. And, when she was finished raising those children, she went back to school and became a nurse. In her 40s, she became a nurse. Those are the inspirations that Nicole had from a grandma that really loved her and all of us that really love her.

Migwetch.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Migwetch. And, again, I just wanted to offer, if the family had anything to add before I ask? So, Commissioner Audette, if you had any questions for the family?

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Thank you very much. Thank you, Christa. Thank you very much for sharing your truth. And, before I ask my question, I just want to say that Isabel, you don’t need to apologize at all. If your heart says, if your mind and spirit says that there’s so many assumptions, this is the place to say it. This is the place to say it, so you don’t need to apologize. And, I have to say, I commend you. Thank you for showing Canada or sharing how you see it, how you live it, how you feel it. So, thank you. And, same for the family who are here and the supporters.
Joan, I understand you’re the godmother?

Yes? So, there’s an important spiritual relationship with your goddaughter. And, if I understand well, the translation is very, very low, so I had to listen in English, and if I misunderstood, your sister was fighting to do what with this case? Make sure that there’s answers?

MS. JOAN WINNING: Yes.

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: Can you explain to me her fight? What she did, so we can hear it?

MS. JOAN WINNING: From the start, she was phoning the police all the time to get more information and asking them to -- why weren’t they charging this person. If they knew who the person was, they did talk to him, they knew who -- his name. She wanted them to charge him. Why didn’t they charge him? I have the same questions. And, each time she spoke to them, they said, “Well, the autopsy report said she froze to death. There’s nothing more we can do. It’s conclusive. It’s all over with, you know?”

But, it wasn’t enough.

To this day, they still refuse to reopen it. Why, when the circumstances are there? They know that he supplied her with alcohol, they know that she was a minor, they know that she had bruises on her body. Those bruises weren’t put there just from -- you know? She didn’t give herself those bruises. Those bruises were consistent with
being assaulted. This man assaulted her, then he disposed of her, and still they didn’t charge him. That was my sister’s fight and that’s what we’re trying to do here today; we’re continuing till we get some answers.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: So, is -- did they do a real -- an investigation on this?

MS. JOAN WINNING: No, they didn’t investigate anything. Like I said earlier, they asked a couple of questions to the family and that was it. They spoke to the guy; they closed right away, yes.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: So, no investigation?

MS. JOAN WINNING: Nothing.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Did the police meet with you, with the families?

MS. JOAN WINNING: No.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Any support from any organization, the system that is there for families who lost a member or a loved one?

MS. JOAN WINNING: Well, we just started reaching out to these organizations not too long ago.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Sorry, if -- I’ll repeat my question. When that happened, did any, like, social ---

MS. JOAN WINNING: No. No.
COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: --- services
---

MS. JOAN WINNING: No.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: --- from the province ---

MS. JOAN WINNING: Nothing. Nothing at all.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Even from the City of Winnipeg?

MS. JOAN WINNING: Nothing. There was nothing. It’s just like we were invisible. And, it was forgotten in, you know, a month, and she’s forgotten, you know? And, here we are, 2017, and still no answers and still -- you know, they don’t acknowledge what happened. This is why we’re here.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Merci. And, for all of you who is here knowing that no investigation, no support after hearing what happened to the person you really love, what impact it had on you?

MS. JOAN WINNING: It’s very traumatic, to say the least. It makes us feel like no one cares about us, about our family member that was taken. No one seems to care that my sister passed away as a direct result of this. No one seems to care that she has kids that have no parents. I’m raising her younger sons and I have the two older girls living with me as well. But, for outside
supports, I don’t see anything. I can say I don’t see anything because I live it day-to-day.

Again, I feel -- I still feel to this day that nobody cares. I don’t know why we’re -- it’s like we’re non-entities and nobody sees us. We’re sitting here in a room full of people and nobody really gives a shit. That’s how I feel.

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: How can we change that?

MS. JOAN WINNING: Well, for me, I want the police to reopen that case and charge this person. I want this person to realize -- I hope he’s watching -- whoever you are, that he’s devastated a family, he’s left kids motherless as a direct result of his actions that night. I want him to know that. I want him to know the pain that he inflicted into our family and hope that he has some kind of remorse for what he did.

Nicole was a human being. She was taken from us for a selfish reason. She wasn’t just a poor little Aboriginal girl living in the projects who could be used and abused and just disposed of. She was part of a loving family who loved her. A good family like my brother said. I want him to realize what he did, this person from Transcona. They knew where he lived, they didn’t tell us. They protected his identity, they protected him. Where was


the protection for my niece?

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Merci, Joan. Merci. And, the sisters, if you have something to share so we, the Inquiry, can remember Nicole, can remember who she was and who she is, a good memory or -- she's an artist, yes, but ---

MS. STEPHANIE DANIELS: She was -- us three sisters at the time were like the Three Musketeers, so we would even walk from tall to smallest. And, she was very protective over my family, my mom, all of us. She wouldn't let anybody, you know, like, bully us. She was the funniest out of us. She had a really, really good sense of humour and she was very funny.

Whenever I was, like, trying to be mad at her, she -- she would do little things to make me laugh, just so I wouldn't be mad at her. Like, I would look at her and she would be making this face to make me laugh. She was just the leader of us three. And, she was a very good make up artist. She was very talented.

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Merci.

MS. ISABEL WINNING: I just wanted to point out these little pins that we're wearing on our shirts today are something that the sisters of Nicole made last night in their hotel rooms in remembrance. We were all going to put on red dresses, but we all don't have red
dresses, so we thought we would come up with these little pins that we made in honour of all murdered and missing women and girls.

So, I just wanted to touch base on that because I’m -- they took the time to buy the supplies and make them and make enough. They handed it out to other family members when we were having breakfast this morning, and I think that also goes to show the kindness that has resulted from this tragedy as well. I think that it’s opened up our hearts to the understanding of what everybody else is going through. So, I just wanted to say thank you to the girls for sharing their little dresses with us.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Merci beaucoup. To conclude, Maitre Big Canoe, we have this basket, because in this mandate, we have to commemorate also our sisters in spirit and if there’s more red dresses that could go in that basket on behalf of Nicole? And, I saw you -- your -- the song, if -- for me, I think it’s -- that makes us, when I say “us” it’s all of us, unique, that the artistic expression is so powerful, so -- and it stays alive forever. So, if we can have some of your words in this basket, so everywhere we go, we honour the spirit of your loved one, I would be very honoured. Merci beaucoup.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Commissioner Audette, that concludes. I do believe the Commissioner has
something for you.

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: Can you explain? Your English is better.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So, Elder Thelma is actually handing the family an eagle feather that’s wrapped in red and it’s good medicine. And then Elder Bernie is offering tobacco ties, as well as seeds. So, there’s some more information about the seeds up in the foyer there, but essentially, the seeds are gifts of reciprocity. We just wanted to acknowledge, so the Commissioners, and the Commission wanted to acknowledge the family for sharing their story, and the seeds are -- you can -- they’re for this region, so you can plant them here. And so, some people refer to them as seeds of hope and it’s just a way to thank the family for their strength for sharing the story.

I ask that we adjourn so that we can have lunch. And, I understand that lunch is available for anyone in attendance at the back here, so merci.

--- Exhibits (code: P1P03P0101)

Exhibit 1: Digital PowerPoint presentation filename “Daniels family” comprising 17 colour photos (11 family photos and six line drawings).

Exhibit 2: ** SEALED ** Manitoba Report of Medical Examiner / Autopsy Report Form for Nicole
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Commissioner Audette, I would like to ask that the next participants be introduced, and I am simply going to introduce them by name first, those that will be sharing their story. And so, right beside me is Betty Rourke; and beside her, her husband Mike. Then we have Lorna Sinclair and Elora Anderson. Then we have Kim McPherson, and beside her is Gerri Pangman, and these are the individuals that will be testifying today. I will actually provide their supports and their family the opportunity to also introduce themselves, and I just wanted to state a couple of notes on this particular group of families that are testifying before you.
So, these families are going to be sharing, actually, the stories of three murders, and two of the murders are interconnected and involve two different families that aren’t related themselves. And, the reason for the explanation, for this upfront, is because the families have agreed to work together, and instead of having one hearing where one family goes, and then a separate hearing where another family goes, they’ve decided that they want to share together, because their stories -- the lives, the way they’ve been impacted, is too interconnected to separate into two separate hearings.

And so, today, we will start this hearing, and we’ll start it, and both families will have an opportunity to talk about and share about their loved ones, their strengths, their contributions, and we’ll get to hear the stories of what happened to their loved ones. And then tomorrow afternoon, the hearing will actually continue at 3:15 in this same place, and the reason it will continue is they will then have the opportunity to discuss the impacts and recommendations.

And, I just wanted to start with that as an explanation, and also because I think the families have been really amazing working together and generous with each other to understand and to share their story in a good way, and it reminds us that sometimes things don’t just fit in perfect
boxes. Sometimes, people need to come together to make this happen, so I just wanted to say thanks and provide the explanation, and I’m going to ask Mr. Registrar to ask for a statement of truth.

**MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG:** Good afternoon, everybody. I’ll just ask one question of all the family together. Do you promise to tell your truth this afternoon to Commissioner Audette? Thank you very much.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** At this time, I’m going to actually ask any of the family members and supports to also introduce themselves, just so you know who is sitting in support with this family. I’ll start with you, Pierre.

**MR. PIERRE DUCHARME:** Hi, everybody. My name is Pierre Ducharme, and my sister, her name is Jennifer McPherson, and I’m here to support my mom and dad, and my sisters here, and I also want to say more than my sisters, like my second mom.

**MS. BRENDA DUCHARME:** Hi, I’m Brenda Ducharme, and I’m here to support my husband, Pierre, and my family as well. Thank you.

**MS. BRENDA BEAR:** Good afternoon. My name is Brenda Bear, and I’m here to support the family and continue on with their healing journey.

**MS. MARY CRATE:** Hi, I’m Mary Crate. I’m
here to support my granddaughters and the family, and for all of you. Migwetch.

MS. NAHANNI FONTAINE: Migwetch. I’m Nahanni Fontaine, and I’m here just to support all of the families that are here today. Migwetch.

MS. ANGIE HUTCHINSON: I’m Angie, and I’m also here as a support for the families.

MS. PATTY: Hi, my name is Patty. I’m here to support my cousin. Myrna Letandre was my first cousin, and I’m also here for the McPherson family.

REGIONAL CHIEF KEVIN HART: My name is Kevin, and I’m here to support the families here. They are an extension of our ceremony and our sun dance family, so that’s why I’m here.

MS. CORALEE MCPHERSON: Hello. My name is Coralee McPherson, and I’m just here to support my family, my mom beside me here, my auntie, my grandparents, my uncle, and this is my Auntie Jenn who we are going to share our story on. Migwetch.

MS THELMA MORRISSEAU: Bonjour. Thelma Morrisseau. I’m here to support Gerri and her family. Migwetch.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. So, for the purpose of proceeding today, and normally I don’t like to talk too much. I’d rather just let the families share
their stories, but in working with the families, it was decided the approach they want to take in order to share their stories. And so, I’m just going to give you a really brief overview on what that looks like.

And so, starting will be Betty, and she is going to be talking about the murder of her sister, Jennifer Johnston, Jennifer Glenna Johnston. And then we’re actually going to talk to Elora and Lorna about the murder of Myrna Letandre. And then we’re going to be having Kim and Gerri and Betty as well speak a little bit about the murder of Jennifer McPherson.

And so, with that, I would actually just like to hand the mic to Betty, because I understand she’s prepared some comments on her sister.

**MS. BETTY ROURKE:** My sister was murdered in 1980. So, being 37 years ago, it took me three weeks to prepare and to re-live my sister’s life right from when she was born, and I want to read it, because I won’t remember anything. So, I’m sad today. This is my sister’s story.

My little sister Jennifer. My little sisters, Jennifer and Jeannette, were twins. They were born when I was nine years old. Jennifer’s twin sister, Jeannette, died from pneumonia at nine months. Jennifer also became ill with pneumonia after Jeannette died. She spent a year in the hospital. Our mom was working, so my
elder sister Violet and I helped care for her. Violet remembers -- I just spoke to my sister Violet a couple of days ago. She asked me to make sure that I tell this. So, my sister Violet remembers taking our little sister to the park. My little sister would sometimes look up in the sky and say, “Look, my sister is an angel. I can see her flying around.”

Through the years, our relationship grew stronger. We had such fun together. She was not only my little sister but my best friend, and she became like my first child, my daughter. We shared many things together. She shared a lot of things with me, including her loneliness for her twin. She had a desire to always buy the same kind of top but in a different colour.

About six months before she died, I heard her crying uncontrollably. I tried to console her, but she said that I wouldn’t understand because she didn’t understand either. This is our young life. We lived in a Métis community. As far back as I can remember, we lived in fear of our oldest brother. When he drank, he would come home and abuse our dad. My mother would take us out in the bushes to hide and protect us.

One night, before mom could get us out of the house, my brother came by. He went towards the bed. Our mom and dad and the twins were laying. He threw a punch,
and dad moved out of the way. My brother almost hit baby Jeannette. She was already ill, but mom bundled her up, and Jennifer as well, and all of us. She took us out in the colder winter night. My sister and I, we were talking on the phone, I told you a couple of days ago, and we both agreed. We think this is when our sister Jeannette caught a chill. She died shortly after.

Both my sister and I never forgave our brother until I was 30 years old, because we believed that he caused much pain, not only to my family, but had caused my little sister Jennifer to carry an emptiness nothing could heal. My sister was a beautiful soul. She was so good to everyone.

I knew she was a Christian lady, a young lady. She kept it to herself. It was her secret. It was between her and God, but it showed on her beautiful, glowing, smiling face. I was always told to take care of my little sister, and I did, until the night that she was murdered. Until this day, I feel responsible for her horrible death, because it was me who asked her to come to the bar with my best friend, because he was a diamond jeweller and he came home for the weekend. I didn’t want to go out alone, so I asked my little sister to come with me. And, even though she didn’t feel like going out, she agreed to come with me.
Everything happened so fast. I can’t get myself to remember. I only remember her kissing me goodnight and telling me that she loved me, and that she was going to come and move in with me and help me take care of my little kids, as I was a single parent. After that, I woke to the sound of my children screaming. I immediately got out of bed and asked what was wrong. My little girls were hysterical. I think it was Jennifer, my daughter, my Jennifer, that tried to stop me from going up the stairs to see if my sister was okay.

I just found out a few days ago that I asked my daughter Kim to go, and I’m so sorry. I didn’t know what I did. I didn’t know what was wrong with Jennifer, my sister. Had I known, had I known what my daughter would have seen, I wouldn’t have ever asked her to go.

I think my daughter Jennifer tried to stop me from going up the stairs to see if my sister was okay. I think Jennifer clutched my back and said -- she yelled, “No, mommy. Don’t go up there. He’ll hurt you too.” But, I got away and I went upstairs. I got to the second step from the top and I turned the hallway light on to catch a glimpse of my sister lying on the floor beside the bed. I didn’t want to see. I quickly came back downstairs to calm myself down, and I told my children that auntie went to heaven and she was an angel now. I then called the police and my friend...
that we went out with. We were all taken to the police
station and stayed there for hours. Later, my friend picked
us up and took us to his place where we stayed until I could
face my parents. I think a day or two.

There was nowhere else to go. We were all
traumatized and my main concern was for my children. I
tried to keep myself together, but I know that now I was
mess. I had to send my daughter Jennifer to stay with her
father, as she was the most traumatized and looked as if she
was getting worse by the hour.

After the funeral, my sister and I had to
clean our sister Jennifer’s room. When we were gathering
her belongings, we heard her voice as clear as I’m speaking
to you now. She said, “Vi.” My sister and I were both
startled. We looked at each other. I could see the fear on
my elder sister’s face and I tried to calm her down. I
reminded her that Jennifer loved us, that she wouldn’t want
us to be afraid.

That day, we found many things our sister
left behind. In a tiny closet space, she had written,
“Peace to whomever reads this and may God be with you
always.” Violet found her personal diary. In it, Jennifer
had left the entire family messages. I quickly copied a few
pages before mother, with instructions from my father, had
to lock and bury it. On the front page, my sister Jennifer
wrote her twin sister’s name, Jeannette Johnston, May the
13th, 1960 to February 14th, 1961. Below that, she wrote
“Vi, Betty and kids, I love you all dearly. For all of the
dumb things I did, please forgive me. All of you. This
goes for all my brothers and sisters. I love you all.”

She continued writing, “A rose will bloom. Mom and dad, if I should suddenly die, I want you to know
that I always had a deep love that no one could ever take
away. I loved you both with all my heart and soul, and
there is no one in this world to take your place. Love your
darling, Jenn.”

Shortly after the funeral, my father called
all the family together. He asked us all to forgive the man
that murdered our sister in order that we may have peace and
love in our lives, and not to hold his family responsible.

My mother must have felt like her heart was
ripped from her. She became even more cold towards me than
she usually was. One day, I asked her how she felt about
me. She quickly responded, “I hate you.” Of course that
hurt, but the truth was I hated myself as well. I was also
told by nephew just a few years ago, “I wish it was you that
died, that was killed, auntie, not Auntie Jenn.”

I often wonder why it wasn’t me. I was much
closer for the man to kill. He just had to open the door.
But, instead, he killed my little sister. I re-live this
ordeal over and over. I’ve always been a light sleeper, but I didn’t hear anything except my children.

I suffered a breakdown when I was 23 years old. For two years, I was hopeless. After the murder of my sister, I started feeling the same symptoms I had five years earlier. There was no one or nowhere to go for support or any kind of help, especially not my parents. I tried to see a psychiatrist, but he only fed me pills, which made me feel worse. I did what I did with the first breakdown. I prayed, went to church and concentrated on my children.

Today, I still struggle with my mental health. I keep close to home as I suffer from anxiety. As for my poor abused father, he died two years after his baby was murdered. He never recovered from her death. She was his pride and joy. My little sister worked at the CNIB factory for four years. She joyfully helped my parents financially. Dad would go outside and watch for his girl every day at 5:00 Monday to Friday, and I do believe he died from a broken heart.

My recommendations and how I feel. The man that murdered my sister was previously incarcerated for an assault on a woman. Had I known that, I would never, ever let him in my home. He was released to a halfway house. I don’t understand why people that murder and assault others get off with a slap on the wrist, but if anyone gets...
arrested for drugs or theft, they get years in prison. As I see, an Indigenous life taken means nothing to the justice system. I always remember there’s a child, and I still hear it, the saying, “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.”

I believe if the system had kept Jeffrey Murdoch (phon), a man that murdered my sister, locked up where he belonged, my sister would still be alive and be with us here today.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you, Betty, for sharing that. I just wanted to check in with Kim or Gerri to see if you wanted to add anything, if you wanted to talk about the strengths and contributions of your aunt, or your fond memories, or share anything with us?

MS. KIM MCPHERSON: I’ll say something about my auntie, because I was the oldest and I have a pretty good memory of the wonderful, beautiful woman she was. I just wanted to share a happy memory that because of her, this is what I do.

She used to love Avon. So, every time we go to her bedroom, we would see all the collection that she had from Avon. So, I buy Avon because and I think of her every time I buy it. She was beautiful. She was kind, loving. She didn’t deserve what happened to her. She was creative. She inspired us when we were younger to draw. I remember the Grease movie. I love the Grease movie because of my
auntie.

But, that night when she was killed, I just -- now that I’m older, I think of something was protecting us girls and Pierre, because he could have killed us too, you know? Gerri and Jennifer were sleeping with my auntie. He could have killed them. Me and my brother were in the next room right across the hallway, and I just remember my auntie’s screams. It was so scary. And, I remember my little brother sleeping with me, and I held him close. I held him close to me, and I held our ears together so he wouldn’t be scared.

And then we all ran downstairs, and my auntie was laying there. And, mom, I was mad at you, but after Friday, it’s all good. It was really hard being nine years old, seeing your auntie laying there moaning and saying, “Auntie, are you okay?” And, she wouldn’t get up. And, she was bloody and it was horrible.

It impacted me as an adult not trusting men, being scared. I try not to be bitter. I try to laugh a lot and smile, but that’s how she was, so I try to be like her, even though she left at such a young age. She was my favourite auntie. That’s all I want to share.

MS. GERRI PANGMAN: I was just like maybe five or six, and this man who took my auntie, he left me forever a scar I’ll never forget. I always remember my
auntie looking over the bed, and I see her all bloody on the
to the floor. And, I look around, and I look and I see him, his
image standing at the door, and I looked away and he was
gone. And then I looked back and my sister Jennifer is
screaming. This man, he left this mark on me. I see it
every day, and I was only like six, seven. I don’t think
I’ll ever, ever get rid of that.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. I’m
actually going to ask Elora now some questions. Elora, can
you tell me about the strengths and the contributions of
Myrna, and can you tell us a little bit about Myrna, and
what you recall about Myrna?

MS. ELORA SINCLAIR: My Auntie Myrna was —
she was a humble, beautiful woman, and she loved each and
every single one of us. I was so small. Whenever I’d see
her, she’d always shoot me a couple of bucks and be, like,
“Here you go. Go buy yourself something.”

She was always so generous with us, and I
wish my mother was here with me, because she can do more
justice to describe what kind of woman she was. My Auntie
Patty is here with me too, and I want her to say a couple of
things regarding my auntie.

LORNA’S AUNTIE PATTY: Hi. My cousin Myrna,
we grew up as sisters. We both lost our fathers in the same
month and same year and because of that, we were raised by
my grandparents. I was just sharing upstairs with the
statement taker how we used to spend a lot of time together.
Myrna used to dream of being a nurse. She left home at a
young age and that was what she aspired to be, was a nurse.

I was telling my son the other day about her
smile. You know, she had perfect teeth. She had perfect
teeth and when she smiled, you could see almost all of them.
Her nickname was Chick or Chicken. She got that name when
she was young, because somebody had bought -- somebody at
home bought chicken, and they didn’t save her a piece, and
she got mad. And, she came and she looked in the bucket.
She threw it. “What? There’s no more chicken?”

And, you know, little things like that even
now, my granny used to tease her. She used to call her Aunt
Jenima, because Myrna was all happy that we were going to
eat pancakes. And, we didn’t have syrup before and we were
using jam, and Myrna got mad again. And, she said, “What?
No Aunt Jenima?” She was trying to say Aunt Jemima, you
know, but she read it wrong.

The little things like that. Even Myrna was
in an accident. She slipped and fell. At first, I guess
she had intended to take her life, but she changed her mind
and she decided she wanted to live, and she slipped and she
fell off the Slaw Rebchuk Bridge or Salter Bridge, and she
ended up shattering the bones in her feet, and the doctors
told her she would never walk again. But, we weren’t having any of that. You know, as she healed, she came home. I remembered her, myself, and I remember my other cousins. It was a large family of mostly girls in my family. And, she would -- we placed her in a corner and just like a little child learning to walk. We’d make her take steps towards us and we told her, you’re not staying in that chair. And, she would, even two or three little steps. And, she walked. She amazed the doctors. So, that says a lot about her strength and her determination.

As my niece mentioned, she was a small, small woman, a very frail woman, but you know, the looks, too, would be deceiving, because she -- you know, if you got her mad, you’d better be careful. She had a cane. I miss her.

My cousin Lorna, when Myrna went missing, she approached the Winnipeg Police Service to search the room, to search the house where Myrna last resided on Lorne Avenue. But, her pleas fell on deaf ears, and she -- Winnipeg Police did go there, but they didn’t do a thorough search, and nothing was really done. And, it was mentioned in the court when we faced the man that took our sister, had Winnipeg Police Service did the follow through with the concerns that we had, I’m sure Jennifer would have been spared and would still be here. That’s something that really needs to be taken seriously, is when family members...
come and voice their concerns, you know, that Winnipeg Police Service or other governing agencies take those concerns seriously.

I’ll also make my recommendations, too. People with mental health issues ought to be monitored. The man that took my sister was on medications for schizophrenia, but he wasn’t taking them. It made him violent. You know, also more supports for people with mental health issues. We’ve got people battling depression. You know, supports ought to be offered for them.

Now, my cousin Myrna was a really very gentle soul with a fighter spirit. We miss her every day, especially this time of year, because this is around the time that she went missing. It’s hard for us when the leaves start to fall, because these memories come flooding back. I don’t think we’ll ever heal, but it eases every year. You know, thank you for taking time to listen to us, and I encourage all of you that pray, you know, pray for peace and justice for the families.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Lorna, did you want to add -- yes. Yes, okay.

MS. LORNA SINCLAIR: Hi, I’m Lorna Sinclair, and Myrna Letandre was my sister. She was the oldest of three of us. I had a middle sister named Carla. She passed away. Like, it was 17. I felt me and Myrna were very
close, and she told me and talked to me every day. Not a
day would go by when she wouldn’t call me, and she called me
a week before missing. I reported her missing. It was
October 7th, because that was (indiscernible).

When my sister said she was coming to visit
me within that week -- I had just moved and she said she
would come and visit me. And, she didn’t show up, and I had
phoned where she last called me from, and she had given me
the address where she was at on Lorne Avenue. And, I had
phoned. I had phoned there and I had talked to Traigo on
the phone, and he told me that my sister had gone to B.C. or
Calgary, and that the last time he had seen her was that
Thursday, and I talked to her that last week Saturday.

And, I phoned my mom, and my mom never heard
from her, and I knew there was something wrong, because she
phoned my mom all the time, or my Uncle Gerald. And, when I
knew she didn’t phone anyone in our family, I knew something
was really wrong, because she would never, ever go anywhere
and not tell me where she’d be.

And, what bothers me most is I contacted the
Winnipeg Police, and they did not even go and check in on
her at the address. They had told me they had contacted
Traigo, talked to him, but they didn’t bring him in or
anything for questioning. And then they came to me two
years later and had told me that they couldn’t find him --
couldn’t find my sister, and on three different occasions, I say to you all that I went to that house. I went to look for my sister. I went with my cousin, Desmond Anderson. He can vouch for me. My friend, Clayton Carrier, they both came with me. And, Traigo had said to us that he wouldn’t let us in. He said, “No, she’s not here. She went to B.C., Calgary. I don’t know where she is.” And, I told him, “I know you’re lying, because my sister would never leave without telling us or anybody in our family.”

So, I know that the cops should have done more. They should have took him in for questioning. I stated this when we went to trial that more needs to be done when our people go missing, our women go missing, that you really have to try to investigate the people they were with, because I know that Jennifer would have been spared her life, and that bothers me a lot, and I hold a lot of guilt inside of me because I didn’t do more. I didn’t. I tried the best I could to contact the police, and they came to see me two years after Myrna went missing. They had told me that they couldn’t find him and that he changed his name.

I just told them you have to do something. You’ve got to find her. And, they said they searched all over Canada. I know there was something wrong when she didn’t contact any of us, and I just want to be here in support for the McPherson family, because I know that a lot
could have been done. That’s all I’ve got to share.

**MS. MARY CRATE:** These girls that sit here
and talk about their beautiful sister, I took care of these
girls when they were small. I babysat them. I partially
raised this one here. I babysat these girls and watched
them grow up. Myrna, too. She was my baby, my baby girl,
and I didn’t even know that she just disappeared into thin
air until one of the -- until Laurie, her sister, came and
told me that they couldn’t find Myrna. And, it’s really
hard not knowing where your child is, your cousin, you know?
It’s hard when you don’t know where our people are, when
they go missing.

I’m here to support my girls, try to be
strong for them, too. I thank you for listening to them
tell their story. And, the McPherson family, we support you
also. *Migwetch.*

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Elora, can I ask a
couple more questions? The family has been talking about
Traigo. Can you tell me who Traigo was?

**MS. ELORA SINCLAIR:** Traigo Andretti was the
man that brutally murdered my Auntie Myrna, so much so that
I had to go into ceremony to -- I had to go into ceremony to
-- I had to go into ceremony to cherish whatever little
memory I had of her, because that’s not how I wanted to
remember. The way the media presented my auntie’s murder
was in such gruesome detail. I’m sorry. That’s not something I wanted to remember her by. But, this man was a vile, evil being, and had he been investigated thoroughly, then he wouldn’t have taken just from my family but from theirs as well. I don’t want to talk about him.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** That’s okay. Patty, you had mentioned the trial. Can you tell us -- and you don’t have to go into great detail, but can you tell us a little bit about what you recalled from the trial, if anything?

**LORNA’S AUNTIE PATTY:** Traigo Andretti was charged and tried originally in Vancouver with Jennifer McPherson’s murder. And then it was through that investigation that he also confessed to murdering my cousin Myrna.

During the trial process, he would basically mock us. He’d come into the courtroom smirking, sneering. He would plead guilty. Like, he would tell us he would plead guilty, and then we get the court, and then the court would tell us, “Well, he changed his testimony.” Or, “He changed his mind. He’s not going to plead guilty.” And, we’d go back again, this time to a higher court. And, again, the same thing.

Three different times we were told he was going to plead guilty, and three different times when we got
there, we were told he changed his mind and that he’s pleading not guilty.

He chose to represent himself. He did not have a lawyer present, although he was encouraged by the prosecuting officer to take a lawyer. But, even us, you know, as we went to court each time, there was no support for us. There was -- you know, like I mentioned, there’s a large family of nieces and nephews, sisters. There’s mostly girls in our family, and every time we went to court, it was just the cousins, like the female cousins in our family.

We went to court alone. There were no male supports for us. I even mentioned that to AMC, when AMC first contacted me asking if I would make recommendations, and I did, and that was the first thing I said was, like, you know, a representative, a male representative from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs ought to be accompanying the families so that we don’t have to go through these things alone. You know, no families that have to face this court system should have to be alone. There should be supports there for them. For me, that was one of the biggest things, is having to do that with no male supports for us.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Can I ask just a couple more questions? And, actually, anyone in the family can answer it. For example, Lorna, you had mentioned the last time that you had seen Myrna was October 5th, 2006.
MS LORNA SINCLAIR: Yes, my sister phoned me October 7th, 2006. She phoned me, because I remember that day, and she said that she was coming to visit me, because I had just moved there. And, she had told me she was seeing this guy Traigo now. At the time when I hear from the police now that two years after she went missing, I find out that his name was changed. So, he was already using this name. And, from my understanding, when I talked to the police, his real name was Dylan Grubb. I remember that. And, my sister said she would come and see me within that week.

So, when she didn’t show up and then I phoned him back and he answered and told me that she had just gone to Calgary or B.C. and had left just like that, and he never heard from her again, I knew that was very wrong. I knew right away. And, I phoned my mom right away, and my mom was a school teacher back home, and my mom passed in 2008. She didn’t even get to find out what happened to my sister.

She would phone me all the time, “Do you hear from your sister? Did she call you?” And, I went through this until 2013 when they contacted me in May. And, I held a lot of anger towards the Winnipeg Police for not trying harder because like I said, a lot of things could have been done. You know, they didn’t even seem to try, and they come to see me two years after?
So, that’s what I mean. They didn’t listen to me when I told them that was wrong. My sister wouldn’t do that, just go off somewhere and not contact any of us.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And we heard Patty say that the police only -- the discovery of Myrna’s body only occurred on the conviction of the murder for Jennifer McPherson. And, that happened in what year, do you recall, the trial and ---

**MS. LORNA SINCLAIR:** We went to trial in -- they told me in May 2013 they had discovered my sister’s body, and we went to trial a year later. That was in 2014.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And, Elora can mention this. The family had said, “We waited seven years. We knew nothing for seven years. We thought she was missing for seven years.” It’s in your heart that you knew she wasn’t, but...

**MS. LORNA SINCLAIR:** Yes. I even made plans to go out and check out other places. I remember talking with my cousin, Red Anderson, one time and she said, “Let’s go look for Myrna.” Like, this was a few years after she had gone missing. “Let’s go to B.C. and look for Myrna.” And, I said, “Sure, let’s go.” Like, she was saying if she’s really out there, you know, we can find her.

And, I had really strong high hopes that I would find her. I really thought, but I knew in my heart,
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depth in my heart because we were so close and kept in
contact every day almost, that I knew in my heart, you know.
But, there was still hope there for me and my family. So, I
really stress that they should have done more. They should
have went and brought him in for questioning. They could
have gotten warrants. They could have done a lot more, and
it just fell on deaf ears.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you for
sharing. We’re going to have an opportunity on Tuesday as
well, when the families come back together, to really talk
about the impacts and the connections. But, what I’d like
to ask now is if I can ask both Kim and Gerri some questions
about Jennifer, and the tie between Jennifer and Traigo and
Myrna and Traigo, if that’s okay? So, would either one of
you like to start with sharing a little bit about Jennifer’s
strengths and contributions?

MS. KIM MCPHERSON: Our sister Jennifer was
named after our Auntie Jennifer, and she was just like my
Auntie Jennifer. She was beautiful, kind, gentle. She
would help you whenever she could. She was creative. She
loved the fine arts. She loved ballet. She loved nature;
nature loved her. We have a picture of her when she was out
in B.C. with a beautiful bird that was perched on her hand,
just like she was Snow White.

That was our beautiful sister. She was so
kind. She was very bossy. I don’t want to speak for my
brother, but she was like his second mother. We were all
close to Jennifer in our way. She was my best friend
growing up. She was only a year younger than me, so she was
my shadow, always with me, probably until the teens when her
and Gerri started hanging out more. But, I did everything
with her, so I don’t like to be alone when I go out, because
she was always there, you know, walking to school, going for
lunch. So, I don’t like being alone. I always like being
around people when I do things.

She worked at Ka Ni Kanichihk with Lesley. I
was sad when she moved to B.C. I didn’t want her to go. I
missed her a lot, and she’d come and visit us every now and
then. She helped us arrange pictures for the family. My
sons, they love her. It broke their heart when their auntie
was killed. My older son has a letter from her and I don’t
even think he opened it yet. She would always send you
little notes on Facebook, and write you letters, always
blinged them up with sparkle and glitter.

And, Jennifer had a mental health illness all
her life, and supports for kids back then with mental health
and trauma, dealing with trauma, because of what happened
with our auntie. We were all traumatized from that,
including Jennifer. We had no supports growing up as kids,
so we functioned the best we could. But, I think Jennifer
was hit hardest the most.

I don’t know. I think I wrote down some
notes. It’s right here. Sorry.

My sister loved to help us decorate. She
loved doing little event planning. We always called her
when we needed help for family parties. She was fun. She
loved gymnastics. She was very athletic. She was amazing
at gymnastics, very athletic. Lots of friends. Oh, and
because we were so close, people always thought we were
twins, and they used to wonder who was the oldest, and I
would always say, “Oh, she’s the oldest.” But, yeah, she
was -- we did Cadets together. I miss her. I miss those
days. She loved Madonna, Bon Jovi, Lady Gaga. Oh, yeah,
she loved Lady Gaga. I played Bad Romance to her at one of
her visits, and she just played it on a loop over and over
and over again.

So, that’s all she was. She was just -- she
met me in Vancouver when I was there for a conference so I
wouldn’t be alone. I said, “Come meet me. I’ll pay for
your ferry.” And, she travelled all the way to come and see
me. I didn’t know how far she travelled and when she told
me, I just -- wow, I was so honoured that she came all that
way to see me, and that was the last time I saw my sister.
I didn’t know that was going to be the last time I was going
to say goodbye to her. But, it was a good goodbye. We
hugged each other. I just -- we fought like sisters do, but I just loved her, and I know she loved me.

I don’t know. Do you want to say anything, Gerri?

**MS. GERRI PANGMAN:** My sister Jenn, she always kept in touch with everybody. Even though she was away in B.C., she shared her love like she was right beside you. I know just weeks before she left us, she left us all a song to listen to, and she insisted that we would listen to it, and it was from Ellie Goulding, Anything Can Happen. I mean, she sent that to everybody. And then the girl singing looked like her daughter, and she was just developing a relationship with her two kids, her two daughters, and they were -- they were just so close to spending time with her on the island, and it was just taken from them. He just took her away, and they never got the chance to spend time with their mom and bond like mothers and daughters do.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Do you mind if I ask just a couple of questions, or did you want to add something else? Okay. So, can you guys tell me a little bit about why your sister moved out west and who she went out west with?

**MS. KIM MCPHERSON:** Well, she met -- I don’t even know what his name was at the time. I think he went by
Dylan. And, they met really quickly. She practically moved in with him and within a couple of months they were married; right? They met online, and then all of a sudden -- she was actually living with me for a while, because I was going through a separation. No, I don’t even know.

Anyway, she was with me for a while, and then she met him, and then I barely seen her after that. Yes, within a week she moved in with him, and then after they got married, they moved to B.C. And, the island that they moved to, actually, I have a sister-in-law that lives out there, and they found each other there. And, Jennifer found some odd jobs there and then they moved on to that fishing resort.

And, before she left, that’s when she was working at Ka Ni Kanichihk, and she had a really good job there. So, I was -- I didn’t understand why she left. But, you know, Jenn would do what she wanted to do, so we just said okay. So, that’s how they met, and that’s how she ended up in B.C.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Yes. And so, just so -- I know it should be clear, but just so it is clear, the two names, the two male names, that’s still the same individual; right? Traigo is --

**MS. KIM MCPHERSON:** Yes. Well, we found out -- well, he changed -- actually, later in his relationship,
he changed his name back to Traigo. So, I was just -- kind of thought that was weird. He was weird. Like, when we met him, I felt this energy around him, and I didn’t like him. I thought he was creepy, and my sister could have, you know, in my mind I’m, like, she could have did better, but that’s her decision; right? But, he just had this energy around him that was creepy, you know? But, that’s how my sister was. She loved and was kind and people took advantage of that because of her, the way she was. She was very trusting, very loving.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** If I may, can I ask some questions? And, only go into the details you’re comfortable with. Can you please tell us a little bit about when you -- you said her children were coming to see her, and that’s when you knew something was wrong. Can you give us a little bit about how you found out what happened? And, only with what you’re comfortable.

**MS. KIM MCPHERSON:** Mom, did you want to do that, or do you want us? Okay. So, Victoria and Jessica are Jennifer’s daughters. They were actually en route to go and visit Jennifer, and they took the bus, the Greyhound or took the bus out there. So, they were receiving texts, and it was a really chaotic time, so I’ll try and remember what I can.

And then one day I get a call from my mother
frantic saying Jennifer is missing, and I’m like, what do you mean? I was in denial thinking, no, because she wouldn’t leave her daughters stranded when she arrived there. So, the girls got there and it was Traigo that met them saying, “Your mom left. She went on a hike.” Yeah, he was giving different stories to my nieces. So, then, Jessica’s the oldest one, she goes, “You killed her, didn’t you? You killed her. You killed my mother.” And, he said, “No.” And then she goes, “Well, where is she?” “Oh, well, she went to Las Vegas.”

And then he started telling all these really inconsistent stories. So, they said, “We’re not getting on that boat.” So, thank God they didn’t, because who knows what he would have did to them. I guess Jennifer’s spirit was there or something, but Jessica knew that something terrible had happened to Jennifer, and it was just chaos after that. We were in Winnipeg, and I mentioned my sister-in-law, because she helped -- she was there, so she took care of my nieces when she was out there, and she was wonderful, and we felt horrible, because they went to B.C. only to find out their mother was missing. And, we were helpless because what do we do?

I called the RCMP, and I said who’s in charge? What’s the district that would -- where my sister is? And so, they hooked me up, and I said, “You better
investigate my sister, because I know the Pickton Report just came out. I know that you guys, the RCMP, doesn’t investigate missing Aboriginal women. So, I’m going to watch you. You better. You better investigate her, you know?

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Gerri, you can share too.

**MS. KIM MCPHERSON:** Yeah, it was such a crazy time. There were so many things going on. There was -- because we -- how long did we know she was missing for, Mom, a week? Two weeks? I don’t even remember.

**MS. BETTY ROURKE:** I lost contact with my daughter on April the 29th, and I immediately found Traigo’s mother, because she would comment -- she wasn’t a friend of mine on Facebook, but she would comment on my daughter Jennifer’s Facebook. So, I clicked on her name and I messaged her. I think it was the next day, and I asked her -- I have it all. It’s all on my messenger. I said, “Jude,” I said, “Jennifer’s missing. Help me find her.”

So, she messaged me back within a few hours or the next day. I can’t remember. It’s hard. She said, “I’ll go to the island.” She said, “My son Jeff will pick me up. We’ll both go there, because Jennifer’s not -- I love Jennifer. Jennifer is not going to go another missing woman.” So, she went to the island and the RCMP didn’t call
me. Jude called me. We were at my daughter Gerri’s place, and yes, Jude told me everything, what happened. And then the RCMP started calling me after she did.

**MS. KIM MCPHERSON:** I do want to say, though, once the -- the community loved Jennifer. Like, they loved her. They helped with the search efforts with the RCMP.

They had boats out in the ocean looking for her.

Oh, yes. When she first went missing, we -- I work in government, and I was ironically working on ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls, and when she went missing, my mind went blank. And then I remembered a toolkit, and I remember working on a submission at work to fund it. So, I used it. To work in that area and then find out your sister has gone missing, it’s horrible.

Anyways, I used that toolkit, and then I told the police, you know, do a poster for my sister to help find her. And, when they did, they described her as Caucasian.

So, I called my mom and I said, “Mom, they might not look for her if we said she was Aboriginal.” So, we made a decision to just leave it as Caucasian, because we thought nobody would help in the search efforts and take it seriously, because we know how society doesn’t respond to Aboriginal women that go missing. So, we made a conscious decision to just leave it and not correct them.

One good thing that came out of it, though,
is that at the time, the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations was Shawn Atleo. So, that was his traditional territory, and he actually got the Regional Chief in B.C. to help our family with the court system, with so much stuff, right, Mom? I can’t remember her name, but she worked very closely with my mother to make sure -- Charlene Boleo (phon).

So, she worked with my mother very closely to help, just to make sure that my mother wasn’t mistreated, that they did the investigations properly. And, she hooked us up with Victim Services to make sure that we got the girls home, and that we got the supports that we were needed.

But, we weren’t in B.C. so we sought -- I called Manitoba Victim Services and I said I’d like some cultural trauma or culturally appropriate trauma counselling, and they gave me one name, and that was Medicine Bear. And, at the time, they had a trauma counsellor, and to me, she saved my life during that time. Colleen, she’s so beautiful. And, all families, where their loved ones go missing or when they find out what happened to their loved ones, they need that, because it saved us, to try and make sense of it all, just to function day-to-day.

But, I remember when my mom called to tell me what happened to Jennifer and that they found her, and we
were trying to figure out why they kept asking us, “Did she break her ankle? Did she” -- you know, all these things, and I’m, like, “Why are they asking that? What did he do to her?” Why are they asking, you know, if she broke her ankle?

He is a horrible person, and he did to us what he did to Myrna’s family. He said, “I’ll plead guilty.” “No, I’m not going to plead guilty.” “I’m going to plead guilty.” He did that to us, too. So, he has a pattern. He told us that Jennifer went to Las Vegas. Jennifer went here. He said that to us, too. He did the same thing to us.

The only good thing out of this is that Myrna, you guys got closure, and I’m so sorry you had to wait so long, because it’s horrible. We only had to wait two, three weeks to find out that our sister was murdered, and you had to wait so long. I’m so sorry. And, that shouldn’t have happened.

And, it wasn’t even the police that told us that there was a connection to Myrna. It was a reporter who phoned me asking does Dylan have a place on this street? And, I’m like, “I don’t know. Why are you asking me that?” And, like, “Why did he kill somebody?” And, she said, “He’s connected to a Project Devote case.” And, the Winnipeg Police had the audacity to say that they cracked Myrna’s
investigation, and it wasn’t them; it was B.C. who did, in
my opinion. I was so hurt by that when they tried to take
credit for it.

This is so wrong on so many fronts and it’s
-- I think we have enough love and strength in our family
that it hasn’t destroyed us. I mean, no family is perfect;
right? But, me and Gerri were never that close before this,
but now we’re quite close. I just feel sick in my stomach,
you know? And, to think that this could have been
prevented, because had the Winnipeg Police done a better
investigation, I believe in my heart that my sister would be
alive.

I don’t know. I sometimes wonder if he hurt
any other woman too that nobody just knows about, because he
was -- he was crazy, you know? And, I’m sorry you had to
wait for justice as long as you had to in the courts.
There’s just so much. Even getting our sister’s remains, we
had to wait until July to finally have a service for her
because of forensics and transporting her back. And, my
poor mom had to go pick up my sister’s remains at the
airport. It was just crazy. Post office, eh? Post office.
My mom had to pick up my sister’s remains at the post
office. You know? At the post office. Special delivery.
Like, that’s horrible.

So, there’s so many different levels that our
family -- we could tell you many stories. I can tell -- my
mother can share how the RCMP didn’t communicate things with
her, like when Traigo, he was sentenced to 25 years for my
sister, plus three years for indignity to remains, you know?
They didn’t even tell her they transported him to a psych
ward, or psychiatric facility, and we found out in the news
that he hung himself. When I heard that, I was, like, “Oh,
that’s good.” But, then it’s, like, wait, well, that
doesn’t bring my sister back.

So, it’s just messed up, and there’s so many
things that can be done better. There’s so many things that
can be done to prevent this. It doesn’t need to be this
way. And, as somebody -- I remember the family before us
saying that it doesn’t matter if you’re a parliamentarian,
it doesn’t matter if you’re just an average person. If
you’re Indigenous, you’re treated like you’re Indigenous.
It doesn’t matter what education you have.

But, for supports in Manitoba, when our
sister first went missing, we had Ka Ni Kanichihk, Medicine
Bear, thank God. But, I was trying to get help from other
organizations like Leaf (phon). At the time, they were
called Leaf. Nobody phoned me back. I called Assembly of
Manitoba Chiefs twice; nobody phoned me back. I mean, it’s
much better now but at the time, we were really alone. We
were so alone, and when you’re going through that chaotic,
traumatic time, it doesn’t matter how smart you are. Your brain doesn’t work. You’re in crisis. You can’t think.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So, one of the things that the families have agreed to is to spend another hearing time actually unpacking and talking about some of the impacts and interactions with the various agencies. And so, for today, I was going to see if it’s possible to put up the memorial video of Jennifer McPherson? And, if it’s okay with the families, I think, you know, we watch the memorial video, we come back Tuesday. I know this is very difficult for you to share.

Yes, and tomorrow we’ll focus on those recommendations, because I know between you all, you have many good recommendations, and I’m sure the Commissioner will also make this comment, but just a sincere level of thanks and gratitude for sharing your story, because it’s really important to understand the inter-connectedness.

And so, for today, I figured if we could watch the memorial video? Because one of the things the families would like to share tomorrow in their hearing is the different ways we can commemorate. But, I did want to ask Gerri or her daughter if they wanted to -- in terms of making the contribution, if you wanted to say something about that? Do you want to add to the basket?

MS. KIM MCPHERSON: We want to share this
Christmas ornament in memory of our sister, because while we
were waiting for our sister to come home and to say our
goodbye, me and Gerri were making collages of our sister’s
pictures to prepare for the funeral. And, after it was
done, after the funeral was done, I’d go visit Gerri again,
and we’d be looking at each other, like, what do we do now?
Like, what do we do now? So, I was going to buy earrings
for my cousin, and then Gerri said, “Why are you buying
them? I can make them for you.” And, I was, like, that’s
right. You know how to bead.

So, she made me -- we bought a bunch of
supplies, and earrings, and we started making earrings, and
then our sister Jenn, because she was so creative, she did
lots and lots of -- lots of things. She made mandalas. She
blinged up everything. She sent us gifts she made of her
own. She made a Christmas tree made of tree branches. So,
I said to her one day, I said, “Why don’t we make Christmas"
-- oh, she made this. That was her newest project just
before she passed, and I remember her asking me, “Kim, do
you want it?” And, I said, “You know what? Why don’t you
give it to Mom? I think Mom would love it.” And, that was
the last thing she made. That was the last thing she made.
So, I’m glad I suggested that.

But, in her memory, what me and Gerri do is
we make these Christmas ornaments, because that’s what she
made when -- 12 years ago, 13 years ago. So, we make this
to honour our sister, and we made a little card just to --
so whenever anybody buys that, they know who she is. So, we
spread her memory around, because that reflected our sister,
and that’s how we honour her.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And so, if it’s
possible, if we could get the memorial slide show? And,
that will conclude for today, unless you had any further
questions, as we will be meeting tomorrow as well.

We’re good? I thought we were going to have
to ask for a technical break, but it may -- this is not it,
actually. Sorry, these are other pictures that we’re going
to look at tomorrow. And so, if I could kindly ask just for
a 10-minute break so that we can -- the magic of technology,
even with really great technology guys, sometimes things
just don’t jive. And, the AV team here has been wonderful,
but we just need a few minutes. So, if we could take just a
few minutes’ break so we can get it up properly? And then
we can actually do that. So, Commissioner Audette, may I
actually ask for a 10-minute adjournment?

**COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE:** Yes.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay, thank you. So,
if you can bear with us for 10 minutes, and when we return,
we’ll watch the commemorative slide.

--- Upon recessing at 15:50
--- Upon resuming at 16:03

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: We’re going to get started again, so I’m going to give everyone a moment just to sit down. And, actually, what’s going to happen is this slide presentation, it’s going to be on the large screen only. It’s going to be on the large screen, is where we’re going to be able to watch it from. And, it’s about 12, 13 minutes long, and it’s prepared by the McPherson family in commemoration and memory of Jennifer. And, that will conclude this family’s testimony for today, and they will be testifying again tomorrow afternoon.

As I had mentioned earlier, because they decided to join their hearings, the continuance of this hearing will be tomorrow afternoon here at 3:15. So, immediately following the video, we will be taking another break, and it will be a 15-minute break. So, once the video concludes, we will have a 15-minute break, so that we can get ready for the second -- sorry, the last hearing of the afternoon. And, the family is just taking a moment so they can also watch the video, the memorial.

I’m going to ask Gerri one quick question. Gerri, can you just please tell us about the music briefly in this video, in this memorial?

MS. GERRI PANGMAN: Yes. You can see the date, October 14th, 1971 to May 5th. May 5th is when they
found her, but her actual date was April 29. The last song is the song that she went to everybody. The two beginning songs, we just picked as a family, and then made sure that the last song was shared, because that was the one she shared to all of us before she left. Enjoy.

--- In Memory of Jennifer Dawn McPherson October video

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** We’ll now be taking -- my microphone dropped. We’ll be taking a 15-minute break, and we’ll be setting up for the next hearing. Thank you.

--- Exhibits (code: P1P03P0102)

**Exhibit 1:** Video “In Memory of Jennifer Dawn McPherson October 14, 1971 – May 5, 2013” set to Abba’s “Dancing Queen”; duration 12 minutes 20 seconds. (Note: see October 17, 2017 transcript for subsequent testimony and exhibits).

--- Upon recessing at 16:18
--- Upon resuming at 16:41

Hearing # 3

Witness: Rachel Willan, Matthew Willan (Survivors)

Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette and Commissioner Brian Eyolfson

Commission Counsel: Christa Big Canoe

Registrar: Bryan Zandberg

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MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Commissioners, I would like to introduce you to our next participants. And, if I could just get everyone’s attention, we’re getting started again. We’re just about to begin.

So, Commissioners, if I may actually introduce our next two individuals that will be sharing their life story with us? And, if I could just give you a little background? Their life story includes surviving violence. Both of them have survived an immense amount of violence, and as you will hear them talk, they’re going to talk about their relationship and how it was originally volatile and included violence, and the type of work it’s taken for both of them to recover, to begin to heal, and to work together so that they can actually find themselves in a place where every day -- there are still days they struggle, but every day, they have an opportunity to continue to grow and learn.

And so, right beside me is Rachel Willan, and her husband, Matthew Willan. I’m just going to ask Mr. Registrar, Mr. Registrar, could you just give the truth statement?

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Welcome this afternoon, and good to meet you in the elevator. Do you both promise to tell the truth of your story this afternoon to Commissioners Eyolfson and Audette? Thank you very much.
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. So, what we’re going to do is we’re actually going to start with Rachel sharing a little bit about her story, and then we’re actually going to have Matthew share a little bit about his, and then we’re going to turn our attention to their relationship, and then we’re going to turn to recommendations that they have and what they’ve learned from their life experience. Would you like to introduce yourself and talk a little?

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: My name is Rachel. I’m a 42-year-old mother of seven, and my home community is originally from Duck Bay. I was raised throughout many different homes, about 53 different placements; lock up facilities, group homes, foster homes, pretty much just 53 different placements from an early age. I was apprehended about 1978, roughly, 1977, given back. Back then it was Children’s Aid. I finally became a permanent ward around 1980, '79/'80 that I could remember.

During those early years, it was really difficult. I witnessed some severe, severe violence from my dad, and my biological dad also was a sexual offender. I was the first daughter, I have an older brother, and my mom had eight children, four boys and four girls, and six of those are my biological dad’s. Six of us are. And, he -- I tended to be the one that got left behind quite often when
my mom would run from him, and he would always say, “You’re not taking Rachel. You’re not taking my daughter.”

So, back in the seventies, it took me to become sober to understand why I had such hatred for my mother, because I blamed her, and it wasn’t until later on, you know, over the course of the last 10, 11 years that I actually realized that my mom didn’t have many opportunities or resources back in the seventies. So, that changed a lot for me once I learned that.

All of us became permanent wards in 1980. Actually, I should go back. My dad, between the age of two and approximately maybe six years old, roughly, it could have started earlier, but I started to remember at about age two of the real graphic -- like, there was graphic content of the abuse. And, it never actually -- I never made mention to anybody until I was about 15, and I actually mentioned it, and I confronted him over the phone during an adult sentence and he hung up on me. It was kind of my starting point doing a long sentence in 1999. And, I thought, well, whatever. There’s nothing I can do.

But, he did show up at our house in 2002, I believe, and he spent about $4,000. At that time, we had two children, Matt and I, and he showed up to rectify, I guess, his way of rectifying the situation. And, I never really seen him again. I continued on really reckless. I
had a kid at 15. The person I had a kid with is -- my son
will be 27 on November 18th, and the person I had a kid with
was an actual sexual offender.

And, it was around this time when I had him,
I was given the ultimatum from my worker at the time. I had
many different workers, but I particularly remember one who
said, “If you want to have the baby in your life, you have
to take responsibility for Rachel and your child.” So,
therefore, he did.

But, at that time, my son was about a month
old, and I left when he was about three months because I was
just a kid. I had just turned 16. And, I left the child
with him, and he -- I already had known -- I found out when
I was pregnant he was a sexual offender, and convicted, and
did spend time in prison. And, I found that right there, as
I sobered up, that I was failed as a child as well.

So, I knew that I had a lot of anger, and I
knew that I had a lot of hatred, and I know that that’s a
really deep word, but that’s the only word that I can
describe the way I was feeling throughout my early teen
years.

At the age of 10, 11, 12, I would run away
and I would actually go into the bars that are not sitting
on Main Street at any time. Like, right now, there are a
lot of the bars that are not there, and I would actually get
into the bars. And, at that time, I don’t think I looked at it as exploitation; I looked at it as partying. But, essentially, I was being exploited. And, I noticed that every man that I -- like, I have three previous kids other than the four with Matt. They’re much older men, and I think I sought that for a reason, and when I think about it, it was like something that I never had was a father.

So, my dad chose to stay away by his choice. I always had my biological mother in my life, and she ended up passing away in 2009, but she got to see the beginning of my recovery. My recovery started April 23rd, 2007. That’s my sobriety date. And, before that, I had met Matt in 2002, and -- 2001. Sorry. And, we actually met in a drug house, and his first questions to me were, “Why are you here?” And, I looked at him really dumbfounded and I said, “Well, why are you here?” Because he was the seller and I was the buyer, like, for drugs.

So, I sat and we sat and talked for a long time, and I guess for him, being forced to sell drugs for his dad, being a young man and having no money, was a way to make money. So, we got to talking, not ever thinking that anything would happen, and I would always ask, “When is this guy coming on shift?” Because he actually treated -- there was a different treating. It wasn’t, “Get out. Go out. Go make some money.” It wasn’t like that. It was, like,
“Here, are you hungry? I can buy some pizza”, even though it was a half-half situation, wrong but right, I looked at it two different ways. If you needed to sleep, he would actually let you sleep, although they were shacks, and made sure that you had a rest so nobody bothered you. And then when you got up, you were safe.

And, that was more than -- so we ended up talking more, and I guess I never thought I would -- you know, as he says today, “I never thought I would be with a woman that was out there,” but he can share his part of the story once it comes to him.

We started off really volatile, and it was like from day one. There was fighting, lots of fighting. We are both pretty much the same. We fought because I got pregnant with my oldest son, well, my fourth son, and our first child together, Elijah, and the assaults were really, really, like, bad. I fought back too, though. I was not -- I wasn’t just one girl picked on. I was in there like you couldn’t imagine, too, because that’s the only thing that I knew, was to fight. And, when I did commit my crimes, as I’m going to bring up on my criminal record, I thought it was important because going back on my recovery, when I sobered up, I always call it my second chance.

I went in front of Judge Umbervel (phon), and I knew I was looking at possibly a 10-year sentence/time,
and it scared the shit out of me. Everybody always says, “Oh, just plead out. Just plead out.” And, I have this different thinking of this is serious now. This is real. I’m going to miss my kids. I don’t know, and I had to reflect on my life. I learned throughout the -- I did end up taking accountability and I always have for my convictions, and throughout that, I met with a probation officer that’s actually been part of my life for about 25 years. And, I requested from the Justice that I have nobody but her, because I’m not going to listen to anybody else.

So, they always gave me her, and she breached me. One time she breached me. Nine times in one month, because I had the stipulation of not drinking or doing drugs, and I said, “Well, when I get out, I’m going to go do them anyways, so goodbye.” And, I needed to learn that.

But, what saved me most often was the jail sentences. I didn’t learn much in jail, but what I did learn is to live another day. And, right here, this picture was me when I sobered up. This was like my turning point. And, when I look at myself, I sometimes joke, because I need to have humour in my life. Otherwise -- but that was where I finally realized that my children are going to have a dead mother. And, I said I had enough, enough fighting with Welfare. It was just something to get on. Every one of these were mug shots, and I -- those were given to me by my
probation officer before she retired.

And, this last time was my opportunity to think about where I wanted to be in my life, and I thought of everything I had been through, and seen people die beside me, overdose beside me. I did some violent crimes, and it wasn’t until this last time that while I was in the Gladue decision I met about 8 to 10 times, and it was kind of like a mini-book, a bio on my life, and it wasn’t until then that we actually realized every single conviction that I have to this day is against a male.

And, it was interesting, because I was, like, oh, wow. And, it opened up my eyes to the anger that I harboured, the feelings that I had towards men. And, I deal with that today. When a man treats me with respect and they’re nice to me, I always think, like, what do you want? I struggle with that a lot today, even in the front line working. I think that somebody is trying to hit on me or is looking at me inappropriately, and I struggle with that in my heart, and I’m learning every day.

But, I’m grateful that I’m here. We share four beautiful children. Our children were apprehended September 6th, 2006. And, again, there was violence involved, and I was let out on bail. I was arrested that day that happened. We were both arrested. I was arrested for having a gun on my property; he was arrested for beating
me up. So, both of us, and we both shared the house, but
because the children were under his name, I was told I could
not go back to that property. But, yet, he remained
incarcerated. So, that left me nowhere to go.

So, I broke the windows. They locked the
house up and I broke the windows, and I lived pretty
transient for a while, for about six months. Then when I
finally sobered up, I was 90 pounds when I got arrested,
because I did get out on bail, and a nurse signed me out.
She was a friend of mine at the time. I did everything in
my life to deny. I did anything that I could just to not
live or not feel.

And, when I finally was arrested, I had
racked up 23 charges, and the most -- the most serious
charge was tying up a man and I gave him 42 staples across
the top of his head. I didn’t tie him up, but my part, I
hit him over the head with a bat, and I couldn’t explain why
I did that, but I think it was -- to me, I feel that I was
so angry, and he was only giving me a ride.

The person I was going to get high with, and
that was just a ride, he was supposed to be giving me a
ride, but that’s how that happened. And, I took
accountability for it, and I could never, ever express the
magnitude of the violence that I had. It was not small
violence coming from a woman. I was looking at murdering
somedbody if I didn’t get the help I did, and I give thanks every day and gratitude for being where I am, despite how much I fight. When I’m in an angry state, I say, you know, I could just go back and do this and do that, but it’s been -- you know, I can count on the hours and the days right now, and literally, that’s the number one thing in my life, is my recovery and my sobriety. The most important.

And, some people might look at me and think, “Well, I thought your kids are.” And, I said, “Oh, no, because to me, if I don’t have that, I don’t have my kids. I don’t have my family. I don’t have myself. I don’t have my life.” So, each day I encounter, silently I am thankful, and it’s just a work in progress. It’s constant. Constant.

You know what? As I was laying in bed last night upstairs, I was thinking of my mom, and I was thinking before she passed, I had her first-born grandson, and I had her last daughter, and I remember praying, “Mom. Mom. Just live. Just live,” because we knew that she was going to pass. She wanted to die at home, and I was praying that she would be able to meet my little girl.

I called her Serenity, and she’s not really Serenity. She’s eight years old, but I have, like, five older boys and the two little daughters are last, and you’ll see them up there. She’s a real little package deal. She bosses all of her siblings around. And, I also had to
learn, you know, we gained custody of them, and it was
during that time when they were taken in September, I hadn’t
seen them for a year. September 6th. I had not seen them
until the following December 2008, and that was the really
hard part because I fought Child Welfare.

I fought for a visit for 18 months in a
treatment facility. I resided in a Native Women’s
Transition Centre and I got to see my children one hour.
One hour for 18 months -- one hour a month for 18 months.
And, I went to the agency, and I said, “You know what? I’m
tired. I’m tired of you guys not moving forward anymore.”
And then they kept trying to send me away, and I said,
“Well, I’m not moving from this seat.” And, they thought I
had a mental illness. And, I said, “I’m not moving until I
know that I can take one step forward. Give me another hour
a month.” That’s all I wanted. And, that is where I found
my voice, because I had to fight rigorously for my children.

It was during that time their dad visited
them 52 consecutive times, every single week, and that’s
what held our children together and our family together, was
that while I was doing treatment, Matt visited them. I
can’t thank him enough, because our children would have been
gone. And, we hear stories of neglect of them and not
eating, which is all too common in the child welfare system.

But, with that, we have our kids now. We’re
teaching them the cultural. My little girl just went to her first lodge — she’s eight — two weeks ago and she came out backwards. So, you know where she is; right? She came out backwards, and she goes, “Finally. Freedom.” And so, I told her, I said, “You didn’t say that when you were in my belly.”

But, she’s — teaching my children that identity that I had lost, I didn’t even know how to be a woman. I acted like a man. That’s what I acted like because of the parties I’ve seen. I used to sleep under the bed while strangers were giving her up in our own bed as children. There would be complete strangers having sex, and five of us were huddled under the bed, and it was awful. And, I try now in my recovery to focus on a positive.

You know, I have my days where I’m up and down and all around, and I’m really — I get really political to the vulnerable people and us women, because when we talk about reconciliation, I never heard the word of that. You know, and colonization. Those two words I never heard until I sobered up.

And, the very first person I heard it from was from Belinda. I was sitting in an AA meeting and I thought, oh my God, this is not even for me. But, I thought that way because I rebelled. That was the only thing I knew. But, her story touched my heart and it talked about
violence. And, I cannot believe she’s been sober for 40 --
older than me. So, I was just stunned. I was just looking
there and I couldn’t imagine that, that somebody is sober
for that long; right? Because that’s all I’ve known.

So, I was really floored at that and I
thought, wow. And, as I heard her more and got out into the
community, it gave me the strength to say, hey, you know
what? I can do this. And, it just kept happening and
happening.

I tried to shut a lot of my trauma to the
past, even though I had been sober for about two, three
years, and finally, it comes to a point that I needed to
deal with it. And, my way of dealing with it is running
around giving myself to others, and I started to burn out a
bit. A lot, actually. And, come home, and instead of
saying hi to my son, “What the hell are you doing?”

So, I needed to realize that I had to undo a
lot of behaviours, actions, and just change myself as a
human being. And, even today I’m learning that. I’m
learning a lot. We just -- Child Welfare, I can honestly
say that, unfortunately, I do some work with Child Welfare,
but I can honestly say that I love what I do. Some of it is
action therapy, and I have a day job. I work with the
vulnerable people in the community, men and women.

Prior to that, I was working with displaced
women, and I had a problem with upper management. I have a problem with that. I don’t know what it is. Colonialism, I guess. I’ll be honest. And, things didn’t sit well. And, I’m a very honest, truthful woman. I was able to do some work with Child Welfare, although I can admittedly say that I do carry a healthy distaste, just because we’re not where we want to be when it comes to child welfare. And, I contribute a lot of my pain to that system.

And, when we talk about that system, I think that I had to fight to have my niece. When you look at my criminal records, it’s horrendous, and it’s actually, like, they’re V01 charges. That will never give me the opportunity to perhaps -- you know, that will go into the recommendations, but when you look at that, you literally get scared away. But, when you meet me, I have a heart of gold. I really do. And, I think it’s unfair that our child welfare system takes that away from families, grandmothers, uncles, nieces. This was my niece.

Over the last 10 years, some of that is changing. There’s a lot of work to be done. But, at the same time, I feel that just recently, there’s a family I’ve been working with, 9.5 years. Her kids were taken in my first three months of my recovery -- no, about the seventh, eighth month of recovery, and I’ve stuck by this woman all the way until now. Just Tuesday they rescinded her order.
What happened was she had a family visit, March 24th. It was during that visit the little boy exposed to his mom -- no, it was the prior visit, actually, February. Over the phone, I heard a disclosure, and I was like -- so as a public person of the community, I went into the agency and I said, “Look, this little boy, this is what he said”, and I did it in an email and I also went in. That was disregarded. So, then, I said okay.

On her family visit, they wanted to take them back into the home. Because it’s in Winnipeg jurisdiction, and I did go back and grab -- like, I took some child welfare courses. It was during that time, April 1st, they wanted to take the children back to the home and the children were in crises in a hotel, and I said, “Well, you can’t do that.”

They brought in an investigator from The Pas, which happens to be their cousin, and I said, “No. This is unacceptable.” I said, “You cannot do this.” Under jurisdiction, ANCR needs to be the investigators, not somebody from The Pas.” I said no. And, I got served with a Section 52 and I said, “Well, whatever. It’s a paper. I’m not going to let this go away.” A Section 52 is where I’m interfering with a family, I’m not following through with the plans, and to me, that wasn’t the case.

During the hotel visit, Winnipeg Police were
called. I was employed at the time at the (indiscernible) Clinic, and even then, they didn’t know that it’s a public duty and obligation as a public person in this country to report child abuse, whether you’re at work or at home. Anywhere you are, that’s our duty. So, they didn’t know that.

So, I got called into HR and I’m, like, no. So, then, he was busy texting me from the online, “Look it. Show them this. Show them this.” So, they were shocked. So, I was in hot water all over the place and I thought, okay, I’m not going to shut up here. No way. No way. And so, I kept going. And so, I went to the authority. They kind of disregarded some of it, you know, and they were under administration again, too.

During the hotel visit, I had the worker come up and the supervisor, and she yelled in my face in the lobby because I was sitting in the public lobby. She goes, you cannot be here, and I said, “I’m sitting right here. This is a public space. You’re not telling me to go.” And, the kids were crying. It was really frantic in his hotel. It was really sad, and my point for being there was that they could not put those children back in that home. There were two sibling groups, four and four. They were split up. Two were here, two were here, but it was a daughter and a mother, and the mother was actually best friends with the
social worker. So, I said, “That’s a conflict. She cannot be a foster parent working for this agency.” I said, “That’s unacceptable.”

So, when they came in, they said, “Well, where’s your degree? Where’s your degree?” And, I said to her, “Well, I don’t need a degree to know what child abuse is. Get out of here,” I said. And then I talked to the Winnipeg Police. And, by chance he knew me, and I was like, oh, well, this is -- you know? He knew me from good work, though. He knew me from good work, not the other stuff.

So, I explained to him, and I was not yelling, I said, “Look it, this is what’s happening.” So, mom had a warrant for her arrest. She took off running across the highway. She phoned him and then phoned me, and I said, “No, no, no. You get back here and deal with this. This is for your children.” She came back, turned herself in on one shoplifting charge. They released her. She took a statement. She gave a statement of what her child said.

That was April 1st. October now, her children are returned after 9.5 years. And, you know what? They want to wash their hands clean. They’re giving her all the money she wants. No more supervisor. Nothing. Here’s your kids. Bang.

So, then, my question was, “Well, why were they in care for 8.5 years anyway?” 9.5 years. I said,
“What was the purpose?” They switched workers, and I’m going to be honest, I’m not -- I’m a very diverse woman and I love the world we live in, even though sometimes it’s violent and mean, and it’s getting evil with the drugs. I got an Indigenous -- she got a new worker. So, I looked at the worker and I kind of got really -- brutally questioned her, like, “So, what do you do? How long have you been here?” And, blah, blah, blah. And, I was asking her, and I wanted to know, and I told her about myself. And, I’m sure she Googled me or figured me out or something. I don’t know.

And, pretty much every step of the way, “Look it, how about we plan this? How about we plan that? How about we do this?” And, I said, “No, you can’t do this. This is how you do it.” And, now, we just recently moved into a 9-bedroom house, mentoring this family the way things should be, and it’s thrown our children off a bit, because now this is their territory; right? You know, like, their home. So, now they have -- we have two families.

But, we explained to our children we’re helpers. We need to love this family, too. They never had what we have. So, that’s what we’re doing as a family, working with this family. So, that’s a part of Child Welfare that -- I love how they turned it around, but there’s women and there’s families, and there’s men. Most
often, our women are responsible for holding that family unit. Well, you know what? I think our men’s roles have been stolen, and we have -- we didn’t make our kids by ourselves, so when we talk about that, most often, Child Welfare excludes our men from that, and that’s what’s really disturbing.

In this case, Matt got the three back while I continued to stay in treatment. I worked on myself. We lived in -- you know, it was so funny, because we got married -- actually officially got married April 21st, 2010. I tried to get my sobriety but I couldn’t get it, and when we got married, he went home with the other three kids and I went home with our little daughter as per Child Welfare, and I thought to myself, hmm. So, we went through living hell with income tax. Well, they said you’re married, why are you living -- so we had to go through -- like, get audited. It was just a nightmare, because we had to shame ourselves and tell them, “Look, we’re dealing with CFS. I have to live here and he has to live there.”

So, we went through all that, and finally I got fed up and I said, okay, I threw out all my furniture, and I said, okay. I phoned the worker. “I’m now moved in now with my husband and I’m not moving back out now.” And, she didn’t say nothing. So, that was the end of that, and things just -- you know, I worked for five years. Leslie
knows where I worked. And, I know I needed to keep myself busy, and I give a lot of my time to other women, and that’s what I did for five years. And then I faced some -- I just faced something that I felt my heart was telling me to move on, and I moved on.

And then I took a two-year course. I had about a week to find out what I was going to do. I just knew I was not supposed to be in this place anymore, so I moved on. And, I took a two-year course in child welfare in a First Nation CFS worker diploma and I thought, hmm, it was pretty intense, and it brought out a lot of healing. I didn’t even know what double space meant. I was, like, huh? So, when they’re asking for 10 pages and I was, like, holy man, I don’t even know what to do there. But, I learned. It’s opened up my heart. In the next year or so, I don’t want to be a poor student, so I want to do my PSW part-time, and that’s where I want to see and show my children the importance of education, but also, I know I need to work. I know I need to give back to the community that helped me, and I choose to stay in the core area.

And, my introvert husband here likes to stay home, and more recently, he’s opened up his wings and been out in the community for the last few years, other than me dragging him around. Now, he sees the realities of our world and our vulnerable people.
He phoned me last week and said, “Oh my God, my dear. There’s a guy wearing a bikini on Main Street and Higgins”, and I said, “Oh really? Well, I see that every day,” and I hung up the phone. But, you know, there’s lots going on with mental health, drugs, and it’s a real -- it should not be happening. People are being turned away for help. It shouldn’t be happening.

But, I’m happy to be where I am today. I won’t take up too much more time. I’m just going to be hitting my 11 years in recovery, and I can’t even believe that. And, I’m just going to turn it over to Matt.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So, Matthew, you’re going to get a word in edgewise now.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** Sorry.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** No, actually, it’s funny because when we met, they’ve been finishing each other’s sentences, so I was actually surprised at how quiet you are. So, I want to ask you a couple of questions, but I want you, much like Rachel, just to tell me a little bit about your background, what you’re comfortable sharing. If you could share that with the Commissioners about your life, and your life experience, and what’s led you to where you guys are at now?

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Okay. I’m a little bit nervous because I’ve never spoken on quite this scale.
Like, I’ve spoken to schools, but the importance of this is way different, you know, but the same.

Where do I start? You know, I’m going to start when I was young. I grew up in central Winnipeg, the core of the city, and half my life I grew up in Brokenhead, Scanterbury, on the reserve. My time in the city wasn’t that great. I mean, I was -- from my earliest memories, it was all abuse, you know? I would get beaten as a child, slapped in the head, forced to kneel with my hands in the air. My dad made me eat a bowl of dog shit, literally eat, or “I’ll beat you”. I’d get locked in the cellar. Pitch black. I’d be holding my little sister trying to ease her pain. Or, if she was in trouble, I would say it was me so that she wouldn’t get hit.

But, it was all violence except my granny, Arlene Spence, rest her soul, she would try -- she wanted to adopt me. She just -- “Come out here. You come live with me and my boy”, you know? And, my Uncle John would teach me how to hunt, fish, snare rabbits. He’s somebody I still look up to. I just -- I visited him the other day because he lost his son, and we just went out hunting together.

He taught me discipline. I don’t think I’d be the same person I am today if I didn’t have somebody to look up to. So, anyways, that’s where I came from when I met Rachel. So, I felt like an outcast, like a caged
animal, you know what I mean? By the time I was 12, I was already in MYC. As soon as I turned 12, boom, MYC institution, and it just kept going: Headingley, Remand, Milner Ridge, everywhere. Brandon.

And, when I had children with Rachel, it changed me. It made me realize, you know, especially with CFS and everything that was going on that I had to put my kids first. I couldn’t think of myself anymore. I had to put her first, too. I wasn’t very good at it. I’m not going to say I was perfect off the bat. We went through so many trials, tribulations. We were mean to each other, and now we work together. We both work in the community service field. We both work with young people. We both work with adults, and we both work with our kids, too.

Like, it scares me when my little Métis daughters, it scares me, man. Just last week, some clown was -- in his forties -- added my daughter and was trying to -- she’s 12 years old and he’s trying to video chat with my daughter. I freaked out. I was so angry at that. What the hell does some 40-something-year-old need to be talking to my 12-year-old kid for on video?

So, it worries me. What is their future, you know? I don’t know.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So, I want to ask you a question, because you guys have both been really honest
about the violence towards each other. And, we talked about this, and I told you I was probably going to ask you a tough question, and the tough question was, like, how did you learn to stop, and why were you doing it in the first place? The violence towards each other or the violence against her.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: Because it was all I knew. It was all I grew up seeing. So, anytime there was a problem, it was automatic. You go to violence, you know what I mean? You don’t discuss things. You don’t think things through. You just react. And, my children going into care honestly scared the crap out of me, because I didn’t know who’s watching my kids, how are they. I’d be arguing with the foster parents about my kids’ eating, because they’d always be hungry every time I’d see them. And, I’d always bring them big boxes of pizza or donuts or anything, and I’d pull up in a big -- because I was working driving truck. I somehow managed to get a Class 1 licence in all of the chaos, and I’d be pulling up with a semi to the CFS, you know? Thank God I don’t drive truck anymore. That was a boring job.

But, I would work for my kids and, you know, I’d show up on -- I showed up on Christmas with my whole minivan, right from the back seats all the way to the thing right to the roof, seats out, full of presents. And, we celebrated Christmas at Burger King. But, I was just glad
to do that for them, you know? And, all the while we stuck together. We would always talk, even if she was in jail. We just -- we had a common goal, you know? It just -- we knew we had to change.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And so, the reason to change was important, but can you share some of the steps or things you really had to learn or do to achieve change?

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** I had to listen to my wife. I had to listen to the females in my life. I had been sexually abused. I had been -- you know, and I just didn’t care. Self-reflection as well, just being able to look at myself and say, “Well, why am I doing it this way? Why am I doing it that way?” You know? Where did I go wrong? And, just reflect. And, I think that -- and being honest with myself, you know what I mean? Being honest with myself was key.

I mean, I look back at who I was and I hate that person, but I also love them. It’s weird.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So, I heard Rachel say a couple of times in her testimony to the Commissioners how grateful she was that you stepped up to the plate, when she was in custody or when she was in treatment, with the kids. And, you both have said that, you know, you still -- you’re not always each other’s best friends, but what are some of the things that you guys do to make sure that you
stay on a good path or that you’re working in a good way?
Because I know she has 10 years’ sobriety, but what are you
doing that makes it work? And, I know you probably have
some tough days, but ---

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: Giving back.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Giving back? Is that
what works for you too?

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: You know, I work with
this amazing man, Mitch Barbineau (phon). He’s just such an
amazing person. We give back. We go do community things,
like got bannock and give to the community, help prepare
food for homeless people, and ceremony. We do that.
Belinda was so kind. She let us use her property for some
sweat lodge ceremonies, and we got to bring all the little
kids and have a little kid teaching day, and it was awesome.
All the kids were just so happy. Yes, just things like
that. Giving back, I would say, is most important.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: That’s great. What
are you guys doing this Wednesday?

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: Oh, we’re going to go
speak to a school, a whole school in Sioux Valley; right?

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: I believe so.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: Sioux Valley.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: In Brandon, Sioux Valley,
yes. It’s a three-person group here. I’m not going to
mention the other one. He’s going to talk about the gangs and childhood sexual abuse pertaining to boys, because it does happen to boys and men. Abuse happens in all walks of life, colours and race, whatever. It’s there, and it’s really not talked about. So, that’s what he’s going to share.

I’m going to go in and share about my life and how drugs just nearly killed me, you know, and by the grace of God and Creator, I was able to walk away not infected with any disease. And, I believe that was for a reason, because I’ve lost many friends from sickness. I’ve lost many friends from murder, overdose, suicide. It can go on, and I can almost -- you know, when I do see a picture of women, and if there’s 20 of them on there, I’ll probably know 15 of them.

Like, when I’m out in the community, I’m, like, “Oh my God, I know this one, this one, this one,” and I’m like -- and I’ve lost this friend, this friend, this friend. So, that’s what I want to talk about as vulnerable kids that are hitting high school, going from one reserve to the city, because we know Brandon right now is under attack with meth, and everybody knows that. So, is Selkirk, Manitoba. Per capita, we look at the rates, the meth is flying off the -- it’s so accessible, and the children are getting younger and younger. It’s so common, and it’s
everywhere. So, that’s what I want to share. And, we have another person that’s going to go and talk about the human trafficking and all that.

I don’t know. There’s something that I didn’t mention in my story in the beginning. If I could just go back? He’s deceased now, but I share -- not my oldest son. I had another relationship. He is now deceased, but I share two sons with him. They’re 21 and 18, and it was about a nine-year relationship, and most of it was -- that’s where I was trafficked, where I actually learned and knew. I couldn’t understand why he would wait right here behind a tree and I have to stand right here.

I had one of my kids. I went into labour when my water broke right on the corner of Pritchard and (indiscernible), and he said, “Okay, I’m going to go get my sister. Come on.” Go to the hospital. I had my baby. Within two hours, I was out of the hospital back on the street corner. And, when I think about that -- that was the first child I had with him in 1996.

My second one, thank God, he was born -- I had him while I was incarcerated, and that’s who trafficked -- that’s where I came in, was being trafficked constantly. I would get beatings, sexual violence. He would do things to me that I didn’t want. I never really knew or heard of the word trafficked or exploited at that time, so I didn’t
really look at it as that. But, you know, God rest his soul, I’ve seen him a few times when I was in treatment, and my nickname for him was Ugly. And, I’d always say, “Hi Ugly”, and he would laugh. But, you know, we shared two kids.

He ended up catching HIV when I left. I left him in 2000. I left him during the remainder of my two-year sentence and I said to myself, holy. I was seeing Dr. Gluberman (phon), and he was a psychologist in the jail, and I just wanted to fall asleep faster and didn’t want to deal with things. So, I went to talk to him, and it was a way to get out of my cell. So, I’d go talk to this doctor and tell him whatever he -- you know.

And, I talked to my mom, too, and I said, you know, I was seriously -- this is me sober. I was thinking of ways to kill him while I was sitting in prison, and I thought, hmm, this is not normal. So, I would talk to who’s now the -- she runs the correction, Margo Lee. At that time, she was my case worker. I would talk to Margo and I said, “You know, I feel like when I get out I’m going to kill this guy.” And, that’s how I felt. And, I told her that.

So, I talked to my mom, and my mom said, “You know, you shouldn’t go back to him. He’s not good.” And, that’s what my mom said to me. “You shouldn’t go back.”
And, I was so tired of everything. I couldn’t understand that I was supposed to be loved. I bore two children, but why am I being sent out there and literally forced to do things? And, if I didn’t come back, I would get a wicked beating.

I ended up stabbing him three times and being charged three times, because he was sending me out. So, it just manifested. And, I finally -- just when I got -- finished my two-year sentence, I never went back to him and that’s when I met Matt by chance. And, Matt’s never been a drug user ---

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: He wouldn’t come around when...

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: So ---

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: For that.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: --- he’s never been exposed to, like, hard drugs, you know, or other than maybe a puff of pot, but Matt liked to drink at that time, and I was the one that was exposed to all that and -- so that’s where the change started to come, the volatile behaviours, because that’s all I knew, was what this one -- you know? Yes, he ended up getting sick. Right after I left him, he caught HIV and then liver disease, and then he was gone within about 10 years.

So, you know, I’m thankful that I went
through what I went through, but I have to say it’s just a living hell and -- it truly was. And, if I had to walk through that storm, then I’m glad that I’m alive. That’s one thing. Sorry for hogging the mic.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** That’s okay.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** I have to mention him, that’s why. I forgot. Sorry, I (indiscernible).

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So, can I ask you guys a couple of questions about some of the recommendations or ideas you have, that you want to share with the Commissioners? I mean, I know you’ve already been talking about the child welfare system generally, but do you guys have ideas that you would like to share specifically about ways to improve, or issues that you have with kids in care that the Commission should be looking at or thinking about?

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** I’m just going to move from that right now, but I do have a recommendation. One of them is, more recently, we know that -- we are aware that we have -- there’s lots of racism. Nobody needs to -- you know? And, we know that. And, more recently, we had a Winnipeg police officer hit a young man. And, late at home -- I used to be in a lock up facility with his mom when we were 10 and 11 because we were chronic runaways. His mom was one of my friends.
And, more recently, after that happened, I was laying in bed and I said -- and I was thinking of the people that actually witnessed that and I was like, oh, my God. Because apparently, he flew 15 feet in the air and then he landed upside down on his head. And, I couldn’t imagine witnessing that, not to mention everything I’ve witnessed. And, you know, there would be one person out of 100, just as an example, that has the ability to fight, and to move and to be where I am.

Not everybody is strong, not everybody has a voice, not everybody is in the same spot. And, I see it every day. I’m the 1 percent that, like -- that actually succeeded treatment centre. Like, it took me 25 treatment centres to succeed, to be able to be where I am today. I wouldn’t call it succeed, but to be where I am.

And, one of the recommendations I think is that it’s unfair that if you have criminal offenses, you’re not entitled to victim services. Those people, what they seen that night, are never going to ever be the same. Never. And, when they have to go to a welfare office because they’re so mental health and they get turned away from -- you know, there should be social workers attached to each welfare worker, and they should be sitting in there and saying, “What kind of life did you have? How was your life? Why is it that you’re applying for” -- and I
literally told them, I said, “Hey, I didn’t come here to argue with a bunch of bitches here”, I said, “for $200.00.” I said, “I don’t give a shit.” I said, “I’m not here for that.” I said, “I’m here to feed my family.”

When I was going to school -- I’m sorry for the swearing, but that’s not what we want. We don’t want to argue for 200 stinking dollars while I was putting myself through school. I wanted to overcome those barriers. I paid my hydro bill and our -- we paid our bills; right? All I asked -- but no, all ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** No, we didn’t.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** What I’m trying to get to is that -- well, I asked EIA, “Okay, while I’m going through school, I’m getting this much money, but can you pay my hydro and my water? Because this is lots.” They said no.

It wasn’t till we moved to the Gimli area, we had this Indigenous worker, and she works for West region now. She says to me, “Why wouldn’t they pay your utilities when you were going to school?” And, I said, “Because they told me no.” She reimbursed us $5,000 for the one year that we overpaid. And then she went to go get all the water bills now. She reimbursed everything. She said it was so unfair that we had to struggle like that while we were putting our self through -- and mine’s only a
two-year college degree. I couldn’t imagine university.

So, it’s unfair when -- you know, my point
-- my recommendation is that when you have criminal record,
you shouldn’t -- you should be able to access victim
services, because we’re actually -- I wouldn’t call it a
victim our self, but that shouldn’t even be in there.
That’s a human rights complaint, because those people that
witness that and they witness everything else are never
going to be the same again. Never.

And, you know what makes it even more
demanding? Because it’s a Winnipeg police officer that
just four hours ago -- he’s very privileged to get off of
work and get paid now to sit at home and drink his sorrows
away while this family, these people are running around
Main Street trying to cope and doing whatever they can to
not think about what they’ve seen that day and that’s just
one of them. And, I can go on and on about many tragedies
that I see, because my employment is right in that radius
of the core. That’s unfair. That’s one of them.

Another one of them was that ---

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: How do you feel
about kids in care being kept in hotels?

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: Well, it’s still
happening. I mean, they’re saying it’s not happening.
They just moved to the outskirts of the city. That’s all
they did. We know that’s happening. When it comes to the child welfare. I feel that -- it’s one thing -- just because I know of the -- a lot of families are not healthy. And, you know what? There needs to be more direct contact with families, and instead, we’re threatened to get our hair pulled out or our pee taken. Now, if we go in with that approach, we’re never going to get anywhere because you know damn well that it’s going to be full of whatever anyway. So, that needs to stop.

They can’t be pulling on my hair. If they try to pull out my hair, uh-uh, not happening. That is a -- they cannot do that. If somebody can come forward and say, you know what, yes, I used. Yes, I’ve been using this. Child welfare should be taking a different approach. Say, okay, what can we do to help you? They always talk about prevention.

It’s so easy for the Pallister government to talk about prevention, but what kind of prevention is he talking about? What does it look like to him? Holy, I couldn’t even imagine. He hasn’t consulted with Indigenous people. I’ve never seen him sit at the table and talk to any Indigenous groups about that he could say that.

You know what? The real people who he should be contacting with, God forbid he would step on Main Street and talk to those people that are out there right
now, that don’t have their children, that are out there because they don’t have their children. Those women are on the corners because they don’t have their children, not given the opportunities. And, you know, when they do get a visit, they go high, they get -- they get told, don’t -- your visits are gone for 90 days. So, then, there’s another 90 days. We know suicide, overdoses, it’s just going to keep happening.

And, I have one more -- oh, another -- what?

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** As I say, poverty too. Like, poverty breed -- like, if you live in poverty -- this is my experience. If you live in poverty, you try to self-medicate, you’re trying to escape reality, so then the -- the thing is, is that it wasn’t until I started to become more successful that I was able to get education, you know what I mean? To better myself. When I was young, there was not even a hope of that. Not even a hope. If it wasn’t for her, I don’t think that would have been possible -- I don’t know. It’s hard to say.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** A recommendation I brought forward too, I think that -- for me, okay, I can sit back as a woman and -- you know, Matt and I, we can have employment, fine, you know, we’ll survive. We can keep doing what we’re doing, or we can advance. When I think of advancing, I’m thinking, oh, yes, you know, all
the hard work. I don’t just think of just advancing, I
think of, oh, my God, no, it’s going to take this, this and
this. I’ve thought about my future, I’ve thought about
where I want to go. We both have and we’ve talked about
it.

When it comes to criminal records, I feel
that, you know, Service Canada employs most people. Most
people. They’re the biggest employers in Canada. But, do
you think there’s going to be as many Indigenous people in
Service Canada? Probably not. Because of our criminal
records.

I think that -- you know, I hope that, you
know, at some point in my life, I get to go and have a nice
-- sit on some beach somewhere if the world is still
running, you know? I really hope I do. But, I can’t go
anywhere as it stands because I have a criminal record.
And, under the new V01 charges, I feel that there should be
some sort of -- something put in place that gives people --
if they’ve demonstrated they’ve been out of trouble for,
you know, 10, 15 years or something, that they can have the
ability to get that wiped off.

And, you know what? That will push people
to move forward, because you know what? Then maybe I could
say, hey, I’m going to get a MSW, forget this, because it
gives you more opportunity to move forward. But, if we’re
sitting and we’re having no opportunities, it’s just like having no choices. You know, they say, oh, life’s a choice. And, I said, well, if you don’t have — not given any choices, it’s not a choice, so get out of here with that.

But, that’s how I feel about advancing and education. And, education is so important. And, I show my little ones and they fight with me. Oh, they’ll do anything to stay home. And, I tell them, no, no, you’re going, you’re going, you know? And then I’m off to work and I phone Matt, oh, my God, was the morning ever crazy. And, we do that on a daily basis because we know we have to. But, with this, I would probably already have applied to school -- to go to university. I am going to. I’m not going to say just because this hasn’t happened I’m not going to go, but I’m going to, but I just say that we need to give people purpose.

We need purpose to move forward. Education, there’s not enough incentives for education because, you know, I sure hope that my children, you know, are looking after me well when I’m old. I said, if you ever put me in a nursing home, they’ll be sorry. Don’t you dare. I tell them all that. I’m pretty -- so -- you know, I had a few more recommendations, but those two stuck out to me, that I felt were really unfair.
And, I have one more thing I want to say, that it’s probably being streamed -- this is being streamed. I worked for an employment -- exploited women are a community in itself because we either get high together, or we share together, or we survive together. The same thing as the homeless community; they do the same thing. So, however you want to shape us out to be in these groups, that’s what society has done.

But, more so recently, I worked for an organization and it’s the only one organization in Manitoba, excuse me, that provides frontline services to Indigenous -- like, to missing and murdered women -- like, you know, frontline services for exploited women.

So, I worked there for a year, and I always will hold my truth. I always will. And so, then I thought, okay, I -- everything is a conflict. Constant conflict. And, I said, everything is going to be a conflict because I either did something with them, or did this or did that. More so recently with my new job -- I ended up resigning from there, with my new job. And, I really love it. I thought I was stopping there for lunch about maybe three weeks ago, four weeks ago.

And so, I went there and I was told, “You have to leave.” And, I said, “What?” The minute I walked in, I had about 15 nice big hugs from the women. I was
like, oh, my god, blah, blah, blah, blah, you know? So, it
was nice. And, within 5 to 10 minutes, I was told I had to
leave, and I said, “Well, why?” And, they said, “You’re
barred from here.” And, I said, “Oh, in the 25 years of
this organization, I’m barred?” I said, “I’ve never once
been violent in a program that I looked up to for many,
many years, when I was in my dark times.” I would never
show disrespect in the home as a participant nor as an
employee. I was never violent.

So, I could not understand what the barring
is for. So, you know -- and apparently, it’s for the
safety of the home. And, I said, “Okay. You’ve got the
ambulance coming here every single drop-in day, you’ve got
people shooting up in the bathroom, and this is unsafe?
You’ve got chairs flying around, but you’re worried about
me being safe”, I said.

So, I’m contesting that. And, I told them I
was going to make mention of this at the Inquiry because
that’s the only service -- what if one day I decide to fall
off the wagon -- which we don’t decide, but God forbid
something happens in my life where something goes wrong and
I’m denied a frontline service? What we need here is more
than that one service. We need more -- we need a centre
that’s open 24 hours that we can have access to.

I went through that thing -- I actually went
through -- I was telling my husband, I went there because I just wanted to say hi because that’s -- those girls were part of my life for 25 years, so that’s why I stopped in. And, when I was told I couldn’t be there, I found that really wrong. So, I went to HR and I went up to the top, and I said, “I’m not going away”, I said, “I want to know why.” And, I think that Manitoba needs to ensure that there’s adequate service for our women 24 hours.

And, you know what? They need to start, like, putting up more cameras, more safe spots. You know, we’re investing -- I mean, if I was to commit a robbery right now, a federal offence, you can -- you can bet they’re going to throw me in the slammer and spend thousands of dollars paying for that. Or if I open up somebody’s mail and I sign a fraud cheque, I’m going to be doing a federal offence, so they’re going to spend thousands of dollars.

When it’s coming to our women, that -- they -- we need a facility in Manitoba. We do. We need one out in the Interlake and one in the city other than the one that’s running right now, because their capacity is less than 20, that’s including the staff. It’s a house; it’s not a centre. It’s a house that only holds -- the capacity is so much. It was just reopened because it was shut down for many years. Now, if you’ve got five or eight staff
running it, that gives you 12 participants to come in. Now, we do know we have more and more every day and we need a huge facility that can accommodate our women out there. And, you know what? Our men are going through the same thing, trans, two spirit. Our men are going through the exact same thing; their needs are not been met. And, they always say, “Well, we can’t mix youth with -- we can’t mix youth with adults.” And, I said, “Well, there’s got to be something that they could do.” Like, it always has to be something, but something needs to be done for the city here, because I’m sure if you were to take a stroll with me in my car, you would be pretty shocked. I could take you to some back lanes, you would be horrified. Well, I’m sure -- you know? So...

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: Or houses.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: Where -- yes.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: Or houses, I said.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: And, Indigenous survivor led. Survivor led. You know what? There’s no higher degree than to know exactly what systems you have. You know, when people ask me what I have, I said, “It don’t matter what I have, I have a heart of gold.” I said, “You don’t even know, you know?” I take that to the heart and -- everywhere I’ve been. I don’t want to sit here and talk in a negative way, but I know that there needs to be truth
-- always be truthful and I’m truthful.

When I turn into a monster in the morning, he’ll say, “You know, you shouldn’t be like that.” “Okay. I know.” But, I have to face everything here while I’m on this earth, Mother Earth, because you know what? I don’t want to pay for nothing later. Heck no. So, I make sure I have to take accountability while I’m here.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: That’s another thing that we always do, is we keep open communication. Like, if she sees I’m doing something wrong, she’ll tell me right away, and I do the same for her. And, we don’t look at it as, oh, you’re just trying to pull out all of my flaws. We look at it like -- like, we’re trying to better each other, you know? To edify. To edify each other. I think that’s the word I’m looking for.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. So, I’ve got one more question. First of all, I want to say thank you both for being so honest in sharing your lived experience. I promised Rachel I was going to ask her about her tattoo, so I would like to ask her to share about her tattoo, and then the Commissioners may have some questions for you.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: Yes. There’s a picture of my tattoo. Underneath the flower is just a scar that’s probably about that big. You can’t really see it, but it was opened this wide, it hit the insides of my muscle
tissue. And, I did this while I was in my first year of
recovery. I didn’t even have to be on drugs or alcohol.

And, I was ashamed. When I went to the
hospital, I told them that I fell and I didn’t want to be
looked at as some crazy woman, and I was already dealing
with CFS so -- but I covered it up with, “I’ve suffered,
I’ve learned, I’ve changed”. I just know that I felt shame
every time I seen it, so I tried to fix it up and I -- if I
could think back now, I think, well, you know, I still
wouldn’t have, but I would have.

So, I did that. And, when I think about
that day, I think of the beginning of my recovery, I didn’t
know how to cope, I didn’t know how to live sober other
than being institutionalized because I had spent so much
time inside that I would end up in a psych ward, I knew
that, if they took me from the jail. So, I was like, okay,
I’m not hurting myself here.

Out in the community is a whole entire
different -- it’s different. So, I never realized the
severity of it until then and I did it over and over. So,
that’s what I did, was by covering it up, and he was part
of that. He was sitting in the next room and I was having
a bad moment, and it just goes so fast, and my arm was
about that big, cut wide open, and it didn’t even hurt,
that’s the thing. I felt no pain.
And, my mom’s response before she died, when
she seen this was, oh, my God, why are you doing that,
making your arms look ugly? But, I don’t think my mom ever
healed from all the abuse that she took from my dad because
she was more worried about how my arm was going to look
than how I felt.

So, I know my mom didn’t do a lot of healing
and I know that if we don’t do a lot of forgiving, we’re
going to turn dark right here. So, I thought about my mom
being at the age of 50 and I thought, okay, I don’t want to
be there. So, I try and forgive, and sometimes it’s
really, really hard and -- I don’t want to die of
something, a sickness. But, I know one thing is that all
the marks I have and the stab wounds -- I have so many stab
wounds from men on my legs, and just scars. Each one
represents something and I really like this one because I
made it myself. I didn’t do it myself because it hurt,
like, really bad, but that was symbolic for me that I
changed, you know? So...

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: You sure have. I
remember.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: He’s such a great man.
You know, he -- most often, I know that -- just the other
day I had a talk with him, and we were talking about men’s
roles in society, and once in a while I’ll say, like,
“Okay, well, I’ll go pay this bill, this bill, this bill”,
and then we’ll sometimes have the spat about the dishes,
eh? I said, “What do you think you don’t have to do the
dishes?” I said, “Ah-ha, do the dishes.”

But, you know, we generally go back and
forth, but we’ve learned a lot over the years and, most
importantly, I think that -- I believe that we were sent to
each other. Like, you know, we can talk about abuse and
talk about it and talk about it, and we know what it is, we
can go into the detail, but I think most importantly is
that we overcame it and we’re -- we’re there together.

At the end of the day, we have two -- you
know, two vehicles that we both earned and paid for and ---

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: They’re brand spanking
new.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: And, you know, it’s
something to be proud of, because from the streets and, you
know, buying things that we want -- like, he always wanted
that as a little boy. So, he wanted his gold chain and, of
course the wife, you don’t have to spend $2,500, holy moly,
on that. But, our next goal is to hopefully buy a house
and -- you know, it’s possible.

We’re trying to fix our credit, so this will
give us that opportunity. And, like I said, advance in
your education. You know, if you guys could fix that, I’ll
tell you, I’ll be a doctor one day. That -- I’m serious.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: Me too.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: I could advance.

Because that’s where you push and you give options to go, because I won’t stop school. I’ll do part-time, but get rid of -- give us a pardon. Not a free ticket, but a pardon.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Commissioners, do either of you have any questions or comments?

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Well, merci beaucoup, Rachel. I was going to say you have something to do now. You have to work. There is a recommendation here very clear. Matthew, merci beaucoup, beaucoup. It’s -- how can we say? It’s -- we’re having hope, eh? This is hope in capital letters.

It’s possible that two human beings, with all -- what happened in our past or previous life, that this is who we are today, and we have dreams, and we’ll make sure that we reach those dreams. And, that you’re using this space to share that hope for many of us. Even me as a mother, you’re giving me hope. Five kids now, it’s not easy. And, there is little Michèle at home now, too.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: I should have named the little one Rachel.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: So, I just --
for me, so I can go home or I can tonight, I will pray for you and think about of the two of you, the names of your children, if it’s possible, and their age? Or if it’s possible. Yes.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** My children came --

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Okay.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** Growing up, I had met (indiscernible) Catholic is what I -- mostly what I was taught, you know? And, I couldn’t understand, well, why am I following Catholic when these people hurt the ones I loved? So, I was really conflicted. So, then, I knew the difference between Catholic and Christian, so then I was a Christian; right?

So, him and I would battle in the early -- in the beginning of our marriage. I said, oh, no, there’s a difference. Religion is culture. We went back and forth. So, nevertheless, our oldest son, his name is Elijah and he’s 15. And then we have Matthew, he’s 14. We have Trinity, she’s 13. And, we have Serenity, she’ll be 9.

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** The three older kids, you guys won’t believe this, they were born October 25th, 26th and 27th, ’02, ’03, ’04. One year, one day apart. So, each year we had one special day.
COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: I didn’t want to say because it’s public, just so you know.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: But, the doctors were shocked, they couldn’t believe it. They were, like, are you coming back next year? No, no.

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: And, you did.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: No.

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Oh, okay.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: No, no. The three was enough. The fourth one we waited.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: She’s a little blessing in our (indiscernible), you know? She’s never been exposed to -- you know? And, the shame you deal with as a mother when you’re exposed to that because you don’t know any other way, that was a barrier itself. Having to tell the psychologist, the doctor, their doctor, their occupational -- this is what I did. As a mother, that’s a lot of shame. And then it wasn’t until I was sober and I said, you know what? I’m done. In order to get -- receive services, I need to be truthful and I need to tell them, look it, I used this, this and this, and that’s what I did. And, you know what? Today, we cope with them.

We have one special little boy, Matthew, he’s very autistic. And, most often are -- pharmaceuticals that are the billionaires want to give, give, give and I
said, oh, no, no, no, never mind. I just know that he needs an hour with his dad every single day or he’s going to bounce off the wall. That one hour of time, rather than medication, will soothe his little soul. So, that’s ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** We do. I spend -- each day I spend time with both of my sons.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** Never mind the medications.

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** --- about, you know ---

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** He needs love.

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** --- make sure it’s at minimum of an hour, so...

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** And, he needs him by himself. He’s a little hog with his dad. Well, he’s 14. He stands, like, 6’2”.

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Yes, he’s a big kid, but he ---

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** So ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** But, all of our kids, because we’ve instilled that school in them, they -- they go every single day, they try their heart out and they just keep passing. So, it’s good. Hopefully -- hopefully they’ll keep going.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** Oh, they -- not hopefully. They will keep going. Trust me on that.
MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: You know what I mean.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: With me around, I said, oh, you’ll be going.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: Yes, she’s our household bouncer. “Get out. Go to school.”

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: I have two more things, Maitre Big Canoe. Everywhere we go, our own families, our communities across Canada, we’re still facing, Indigenous women and girls, the violence, and we have here two amazing people who decided that instead of being violent, we’ll change that to love or forgiveness. But, when that moment, that anger or that frustration, instead of being violent, how do you -- what is the magic that make you -- that those days are over between you and your wife or the family? It’s just so people can learn --

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: I just keep chalking it up to getting old, but I’m probably wrong. I think it’s just -- I think we have different coping mechanisms now. Like, me, I spend more time outside and that helps me. Like, I’ll bring my sons outside. We’ll have a fire, or you know, I even set up a punching bag outside for them so they could let out aggression and -- I just -- I think that our -- we cope differently. Like, when we argue, I’ll say, “Okay, I’m going out.” “Okay. Leave.”

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: And (indiscernible) is
part of the door. I’m just kidding.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: No. No. I hope that doesn’t happen. No, it ---

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: I’m only kidding.

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: No, she doesn’t stop me. It’s...

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: Yes, we need to be clear. I believe that ---

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: And then I bring back a coffee and she’s good. Steeped tea.

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: I think that we’ve learned to -- to wind down. You need an hour a day at least to wind down. And, you know -- and I always tell the kids when I walk in, okay, mom just needs an hour. Or when they come in my space, my kids because they’re excited, right, at the end of the day, I’m just hearing all of them and I’m just like -- and then I say, “Okay, just wait. You got me, guys.” And, I’ll go like this to them, “Okay, one at a time.” And then I’ll listen to each of their little thing, you know, give them a few minutes, and then, “Okay. Mom’s tired. I’m going to go in my room and have a rest. I’ll come out in a while.” They know.

So, diverting yourself back to quietness just to re-gather yourself, whether it’s a little nap usually -- I must be getting old because I go for a nap all

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the time after work. So, that’s kind of how we do it. Or he -- like, we’re just set up that way, designed to separate ourselves whenever we get heated. And, usually, I become dramatic, I just race in my car, I squeal out, and go calm down in a parking lot somewhere ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Yes.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** --- because I need to. Because I’m not perfect, I need to wind down because I know what I’m capable of and it’s not good. So, I leave sometimes and it could be the most -- the situation could not even be the biggest issue, it could be just about who didn’t clean their room and I can blow it out of proportion, so then I know I leave. And, when I come back, hey, he did his room.

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Yes.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** So, we double the parenting ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Well, because I can understand too, like -- so I try to -- I try to get on the kids too. Like, if she asks -- but that’s -- I think that’s normal. I don’t even know what normal is anymore, but I think -- you know, just trying to become whatever vision in my head is normal, that’s -- that’s the goal.

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** My last -- *merci beaucoup*. My last -- it’s a gift. You’re sharing --
giving us gift. What would you say to mothers or fathers that are struggling today and they’re listening to you? They’re in the same path that you were before. What would you say to them? And, for me, I want to ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** You have a gift, find out what it is and bring it out. Show the world. That’s what I would say.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** What I do is -- I was going to retreat. I’m not going to take long here. Sitting in class one day, I was told in our class -- and I know it’s under the child welfare legislation. But, if your children become permanent wards, apparently, as a worker, you’re told to tell that -- you know, your -- that your children are with us till they’re 18. And, this was told by a person with a Master’s degree -- I’m not going to mention them, but -- and I looked and I was, like -- and in my class I had -- it was very diverse. I had one woman who moved here from Sudan. She left -- very war torn; right? And, we were all Indigenous women and we had her -- we were teaching her our language -- oh, it was awesome.

But, anyway, she said that we’re to tell our families -- this is what she said, you’re to tell your families that you don’t get your kids back till they’re 18? So, I raised my hand and I said, “Oh, no, no, no, nobody here tell their families that if you become a worker ever.”
I said you don’t ever tell your families that they’re with the government till they’re 18. That’s wrong. And, you know, I got a 66 in my mark and I was so -- I was so angry. And, I thought, well, you know what -- I said, “Well, did I pass?” She says yes. “Oh, well that’s all that matters”, I said. I didn’t want to battle it out.

But, I thought, that is so wrong on a level to tell somebody that. Where do you give that family hope? Because that’s what I was told from Métis Child and Family Services, that I’m not going to get my kids. Oh, no. And, I said, “Oh, you watch. You watch. You know, I’m going to have my kids. You’re not having my kids. No.” And, I was a little bull. I said no. So, when this person said that, it hurt me, because we’ve got a lot of -- a long way to go. Never tell a family that.

After the one year, you know what? Brace yourself. Do your programs. Do what you’ve got to do, you know? And, it’s hard -- it’s hard being lonely. It’s even hard trying to be on welfare while you’re doing treatment. You either have to be in a treatment facility or wait eight to ten months to get into one, but there’s no transitional housing for our women to get well, to live while they’re waiting that year to get their children.

We need, like, buildings that can accommodate 50 women until they get their children back and
not micro-manage them if they have a slip and call them, well, you know what, you’re kicked out. We don’t need that. We need to work really close with our women and our men. A man’s house, a woman’s house, because there are men, given the opportunity, that will take their children out of child welfare.

So, I know that my way is I always say no, you can do it. I know you’re going to do it. You know what? And, I guide them. And, I use a lot of my energy sometimes where I drain myself. But, like, this family was the biggest fight of all, this family that’s in my home right now. When I went to the minister, I e-mailed -- there was this new field in there, I said it -- and they weren’t replying to me, so I got really bull-headed. Always some -- I phoned there, “You didn’t reply back to me. What’s happening?” And then they got on the agency. That’s why the order was rescinded so fast.

So, me, I always give them hope. I held onto hope. So...

MR. MATTHEW WILLAN: And, for me, for any dads, I went to this -- I went to -- like, it was a FASD -- like, to learn. It was a big event to learn about FASD and there was a lot of CFS workers there. And, this one supervisor I was talking to, and she -- I told her what had -- like, that I won the kids back off -- my children back
off of a permanent order, and she said, “That is -- you
know, in 14 years as a CFS worker, that’s the first time I
ever seen a man win his kids back off a permanent order.
14 years.” I said, “That is terrible.” I said, “That’s so
terrible, what you just said to me.” 14 years. So -- but
I would just like to say that it is possible because I did
it. I was stubborn, just like my wife. I wouldn’t give
up. So...

MS. RACHEL WILLAN: And, you know, they try
-- the way Manitoba Child Welfare works, anybody can have
animosity or -- you know, like a little bit of this or that
towards you, and make that phone call. Their duty and
obligation is to come and do a check up. So, when they
come to my house, I say, “Oh, stand outside. You know
what? Better yet, go stand over there and I’ll talk to you
over there. You’re not stepping in my house.” I do that,
because people won’t like that -- the truth and they’ll
phone on you and say any little thing; right? Anything.
And, that’s wrong. That’s wrong when people can just do
that, phone on somebody and say anything, and then you have
these CFS workers and -- because of your history. It’s
always going to follow you. Always.

So, when they come to my house and try and
even be snoopy, they don’t even get past the door. “Go
stand outside and I’ll talk to you outside”, and nothing’s
happening. Slam. I do that because I have a distaste.
And, that’s okay to have one because I’m in my protection
mode of my children and I never want to feel the pain again
of losing my children. That’s why I become that way. And,
to them I might look aggressive, but oh, I will be if it
comes to my children.

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Yes, we’ll -- we have
different thoughts on that. I’m like ---

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** He tells me to be nice.
And, I said, “Oh, I’m not being nice ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Yes, I’m like, “Yes,
come on in.”

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** --- to them.”

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** “Come on in, you know?
Come look. Do you want to see my kids or” ---

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** I won’t. No. That’s my
territory. I said, “You go stand over there. This is my
territory right here. Go.”

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So, this part, where
they were finishing each other’s sentences and talking when
I was meeting them. So, in the beginning ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Here we go.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** This is why I said
to Matthew. I was surprised that ---

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Well, I think when she
was telling her story, it was important for me to be quiet.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And, that was very lovely and very respectful. Do the Commissioners have any further questions? So, actually, if I could just grab that mic from you? The Commissioners would like to gift you with something. So, I’m just going to take your other feathers.

**MS. RACHEL WILLAN:** Can I just give this to my kookoo (phon) just for one second? She’s been a part of my journey this entire time. And, I just want to thank many people here that know me and have been a part of my journey when I was in my recovery, and they all know who they are. I thank you for crossing my journey and for the ones that are -- I’m about to make friendships with. And, most importantly, I want to thank my mother, but she’s not here, she’s sick, Charlene Gladue, as well as my kookoo, Belinda, and all the supports. And, Matt has some people to thank, I guess.

**MR. MATTHEW WILLAN:** Mitch Barbineau, Belinda Vandenbroeck, Dr. Marlon Bennett (phon). Those are really influential people. And, Alaya McIvor. Good friend. And, that’s it.

**MS. BELINDA VANDENBROECK:** I just want to say very quickly that I really believe that these two have a PhD already, eh? Personal history dossier, you could
never ever learn any of that in a university and I love them both and their kids are just wonderful. That little -- what’s her name? Oh, my gosh. Like, “Mama.” But, she’s cute.

--- Exhibits (code: P1P03P0103)

Exhibit 1: Unnumbered and unmarked set of seven black-and-white photocopies of photos of Rachel Willan at various points of her life as a young woman.

Exhibit 2: Digital image of tattoo over self-harm photograph.

Exhibit 3: Single small-format digital image of Willan family.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Excellent.

Commissioner Eyolfson and Commissioner Audette, I would like -- I would ask that we conclude the hearing for today and adjourn it to tomorrow morning when I believe, based on the schedule, it begins at 9:00 a.m. in the same location. So, if we could please close? And, I thank everyone for coming.

Hello. Sorry, I actually just wanted to let you know that although the hearing commences -- there will be a hearing at 9:00 a.m., there will be announcements and an opening prayer tomorrow at 8:30. Beginning here at 8:30 is the opening prayer. 8:30 a.m. in this room. And -- oh,
my apologies. It will be you, Thelma? Thelma is actually going to do a closing prayer for us.

    MS. THELMA MORRISSEAU:  Can we just -- can you just stop where you are right now, please? Thank you. I’d like us to finish this day with a prayer, but I want to say migwetch to Rachel and her husband. Man, you guys are so inspirational. You give me hope, you really do.

    And, I would like -- I have asked my sister, Mary, to close us off with a prayer in her language.

    MS. MARY CRATE: (Speaking in Native language).

--- Upon adjourning at 18:22
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Shirley Chang, 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.

__________________________
Shirley Chang

Shirley Chang

January 18, 2018