National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Public Hearings
Edmonton Inn, Wildrose Ballroom
Edmonton, Alberta

Tuesday November 7, 2017
Public Volume 21

Gayle Graham & Elaine Dreaver,
In Relation to Catherine Linda Dreaver;

Melanie Dene, In relation to Shelly Tannis Dene

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II

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(Representative)

Note: For the purpose of establishing this record of attendance, counsel and representatives are considered present whether they attended one or all of the public hearings held over the course of the day at the Edmonton Inn and Convention Centre – Wildrose Ballroom (Public #2)
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Hearing # 1 | 1 |
| Witness: Gayle Graham and Elaine Dreaver | 1 |
| In relation to Catherine Linda Dreaver | 1 |
| Heard by: Commissioner Brian Eyolfson | 1 |
| Commission Counsel: Joseph Murdoch-Flowers | 1 |
| Elders, Grandmothers, Knowledge-Keepers: Laureen «Blu» Waters | 1 |
| Clerk: Tasha-Dawn Doucette | 1 |
| Registrar: Bryan Zandberg | 1 |
| Alberta Commissioner for Oaths: Jeff Weigl | 1 |

| Hearing # 2 | 27 |
| Witness: Melanie Dene | 27 |
| In relation to Shelly Tannis Dene | 27 |
| Heard by: Chief Commissioner Marion Buller | 27 |
| Commission Counsel: Breen Ouellette | 27 |
| Elders, Grandmothers, Knowledge-Keepers: Rick Lightning, Laureen «Blu» Waters | 27 |
| Clerk: Tasha-Dawn Doucette | 27 |
| Registrar: Bryan Zandberg | 27 |
| Alberta Commissioner for Oaths: Jeff Weigl | 27 |
IV

LIST OF EXHIBITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Digital folder of three images displayed on monitors during public hearing.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>News article “Body in slough still a mystery: Woman disappeared in 1983” by Ian Williams; no publication data, one-page copy.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Witnesses: Gayle Graham and Elaine Dreaver
Exhibits (code: P1P05P0104)

Witness: Melanie Dene
Exhibits: none entered.
--- Upon commencing on Tuesday, November 7, 2017 at 10:20 a.m.

Hearing # 1

Witness: Gayle Graham and Elaine Dreaver

In relation to Catherine Linda Dreaver

Heard by Commissioner Brian Eyolfson

Commission Counsel: Joseph Murdoch-Flowers

Elders, Grandmothers, Knowledge-Keepers: Laureen “Blu” Waters

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Commissioner Eyolfson, today, I have the honour -- the honour of -- of working with Gayle Graham, who is the sister-in-law to Elaine Dreaver, and who is the sister of Linda Dreaver who died in 1983. And as we’re -- and we were preparing for this I -- I went over the -- the oath or affirmation, and both told me they wanted to swear an oath on the Bible, so I would ask that that be administered now.

GAYLE GRAHAM, Sworn:

ELAINE DREAVER, Sworn:

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: So -- so as we were talking about, we’ll need to have the -- the microphone, so if -- are you okay holding the microphone, or would you?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Yes.
MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Yeah? Okay. Great. And we -- you know, we’ll have to pass it back and forth as you take turns talking. So yeah, we -- we had a great meeting yesterday. And it was so wonderful to meet both of you and -- and talk. Thank you for that. And I just wanted to continue that conversation today, and maybe we’ll talk about some of the same things that we talked about yesterday, I’m sure. Or maybe we’ll talk about some new things. But why don’t we start by hearing from you about why you wanted to be here and what do you want to tell the Inquiry?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak here. For many years, I’ve suffered watching my mother, the pain and anguish of losing three, four of her children before she passed on, but the loss of my sister, Catherine Linda Dreaver was overwhelming because she went missing.

She was missing for nine months, and it was just out of the hopelessness that hit my mother that there was nothing that was being done. And the not knowing what happened to her. And at the resolution of, actually my sister’s body being discovered, there was still a sense of hopelessness that nothing, no accountability, no real feeling that anything, no accountability would happen in regards to what happened to her.
And it is actually took so much life out of her, that when she passed away we all felt so -- I don’t know, like a sense of uselessness that there was nothing that we could do to comfort her. And I decided that I wanted to come forward, even though this is so incredibly hard for me. But I -- I did want her name added into this list, and I want just, I don’t know, to feel better that we’re doing something that might change how people perceive how Indigenous people are treated in this country.

And I would personally would really love to be able to see that it’s -- like for me I look at it and I always feel like it’s always open season for Indigenous people. And I’d like to see that end. And I’d like to see some people actually being punished -- caught, punished -- caught, and then punished, and held accountable for it.

And I want to see that end. And even though how terrifying this is for me, it’s very important.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: You -- you mentioned the word hopelessness, even that hopelessness was something that you and your family felt when your sister was found?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Yes.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Why -- where does that hopelessness come from?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: It came from experience
of other tragedies that happened earlier in our family. And the police would come, and they take the information, but that would be kind of it. And there was never anything ever done. It was just like, well it’s just another typical Saturday night. And -- the stereotypes of being First Nations in Canada is a sense of hopelessness.

And it’s just been years and years and years and I’m -- I’m an old person now. And since I was a little girl growing up, I have never felt worthy. And that came passed down from my mother. And that must have come from her mother. So we’re talking generations and generations, and now at my age a sense of hopelessness I hope is going to come to an end.

But it’s hard to change the inside of me, because I’ve known better. Or I’ve seen the opposite to be true. So I don’t know if you can actually change that part of me, but I hope by being here that that will come to an end. And that maybe with my stories, and other stories that are to come here, that we will start to get some pride back into our nation. And maybe some reconciliation, and some accountability.

And from here we can start growing forward instead of backwards. Every time we take one step forward, we seem to take two steps back. And I’m hoping between this and the Truth and Reconciliation, that’ll happen; and
I remain hopeful. It’s the first time I’ve been optimistic in a long time. So, that’s it.

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** You -- you mentioned also accountability, and you talked about police coming and taking information, and treating it like it’s just another Saturday night.

**MS. ELAINE DREAVER:** M’hm.

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Do you want to talk about your experience with the police during the -- the time that your sister disappeared, and when she was found? Is that something that you want to talk about?

**MS. ELAINE DREAVER:** Unfortunately, I don’t have that much experience, because I was out of country at the time when she went and disappeared. I had a very close relationship with my sister, and I had seen her about two weeks before she went missing.

I lived in Vancouver, she was living in Edmonton. And we had a very close relationship, and we had the most beautiful meeting. And we managed to talk about things that normally we never get to talk about. And for some reason it was the most beautiful goodbye that I’ve ever had with another human being.

And I went back to Vancouver, and two weeks later she went missing. And I knew in my heart that she would not have left me without saying goodbye. Everybody
else in my family remained hopeful that -- that she’d just went off and went on a walk about, but I knew that that was not true.

So I didn’t actually have that much experience in regards to -- because it took nine months. And at that point, I was out of the country. But my stories are literally just from listening to my mother. Her tearful experiences with dealing with the police officers.

And then again when they found her body, it wasn’t like -- they didn’t even want to think of it as a murder. And that hurt immensely because there’s no way that my sister would have walked to the outside of the city and thrown herself into a slough. And that’s how they found her.

And even to this day, they still don’t want to admit that that was wrongdoing. And it just seems impossible that that could be the case.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: At the time of her disappearance, where did she live?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: She had just moved to Edmonton. She used to live with us. I used to live with her and her husband in Vancouver. After a long relationship, they broke up. No, they -- I’m sorry. They moved to Kelowna to try to reconcile their relationship,
but it couldn’t happen. So she moved to Edmonton with the idea of a new start.

He moved back down to Boulder, Colorado, and I remained in Vancouver.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Hmm.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: And, but she had just moved here.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: And whereabouts in the city was she living?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: She was living around a 102nd Street. I’m sorry, I -- I -- I can’t really remember. It was close to the Senate city, but not in a downtown core.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Hmm. And what was she up to around that time?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: She was a key punch operator. But in the 80’s times were tough. And they more or less just kept giving her part time jobs, so it wasn’t that she didn’t want to work; she was working usually six months, dance everywhere, but continually working.

But I think at that -- at that precise time that she was probably unemployed, but only temporary.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: M’hm. And you mentioned that she was -- she disappeared, and she was found outside of town.
MS. ELAINE DREAVER: That’s right. Near Sherwood Park.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: And how far is Sherwood Park from downtown about?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: That’s a good question. I don’t really live in Edmonton anymore, 15, 12. Yeah. And my sister didn’t drive at the time, so there’s no way in the world that she would have got to such a remote area on her own.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Right. Oh. Yesterday you spoke quite you know, with -- with such fun -- fun memories of -- of your loving relationship with Linda.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Yes.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Did you want to talk about that?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: My sister -- my sister was six years older than I am. Very protective. So loving. It is a big sister that everybody would love to have. But she moved to Vancouver, I was living in Edmonton. And she welcomed me into her life, into her relationship with her husband. They took me into their home and made me feel so comfortable and a part of their life.

She was always the kind of woman that would
bring home the dog with one leg, two legs. Any sort of person that didn’t fit in well or felt uncomfortable she always brought into the fold. She loved the Moody Blues, she just felt a kinship with them.

Even today, I can almost feel her presence here. It’s -- she is so warm, she was so loving, and yet, kind of tragic at the same time. You know, she always struggled with being accepted herself. She liked very traditionally Native, and in Edmonton in a few cities through Canada it’s not always an easy role.

Yeah, but we all loved her so much in our family. It took -- she was the special one in the family, and when she disappeared it -- it ripped a hole in each and every one of us in her hearts. And I’m just hoping that she’s here today. I bet she’s happy that somebody is standing up for her for a change.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Hmm.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: I’d just like to thank her for being (indiscernible). You’d love her.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: I’ll just pass the mic to you. So, Gayle, what’s your relationship to Linda?

MS. GAYLE GRAHAM: I was married to Linda’s brother, so sister-in-law to Elaine and to Linda. I was living in Edmonton when Linda disappeared. And when Jesse
(ph) their -- their mother called me to let me know that Linda had disappeared, the -- the stories that -- that she told me with -- actually the -- the family kind of used to laugh about Linda, because Linda, every -- everything in Linda’s place was spotless all the time. And I’m not like that.

I -- so when Jesse went over to check Linda’s place, there was a teapot, and two cups on the table, but one of the cups had fallen on the floor, and Linda was gone. And knowing Linda, she never would have left a cup on the floor.

Besides that, because like Elaine said, times were really difficult in the early 80’s, and so Linda was working temporary jobs and at the time she disappeared, she was on unemployment insurance. And her UI cheque was sitting on -- on the night table beside the bed. And she never would have left you know, without having any money.

So the cheque -- the cheque was there, the coffee cup was on the floor, Jesse went to the police, and the police said she’s 33. She’s an adult. There’s nothing we can do. And then the land lady told Jesse that she had to clean the place out by the end of the month so that the land lady could re-rent the basement suite.

And the basement suite was on about 89th Street and a 114th Avenue, which like Elaine says it’s --
it’s fairly close to downtown, but it’s not right in the downtown core. Sherwood Park where -- where the remains were found is like -- like I said, 11 or 12 miles out.

But just nobody believed that Linda would have walked out to the middle of nowhere, to a field. The -- the police didn’t follow up. Even when Linda didn’t show up, Jesse called me at Christmas time and said that she was pretty sure that Linda was dead, because there was no way that Linda would have not called her on Christmas.

But they didn’t find her body until the following May. She had disappeared in September. And that’s -- you know, after the remains were found the -- the investigation changed to the RCMP, because it was outside the city. I don’t know if the RCMP ever talked to the city police, or any follow up was done.

They interviewed everybody that had known Linda, but nobody knew anything about why she had disappeared or -- or what had happened. They couldn’t find a -- a cause of death from the remains, because they had deteriorated.

But I remember the -- the funeral. And that Jesse couldn’t stand up. They -- her -- her sons were -- were carrying her to follow the coffin. She -- I don’t know what else to say. I mean Linda -- thank you. Linda was a bridesmaid at my wedding to her brother.
I was telling a story before about Linda was a bridesmaid, and my sister was a bridesmaid. And both of them were really shy. And -- and but my sister was a school teacher, and I think Linda expected her to be more outgoing than she was.

And my -- my sister kind of sat in the corner at the wedding, because she was afraid to talk to anybody, and Linda -- Linda who was really shy too, pushed herself and went around and greeted all the guests at the wedding. And even though it wasn’t at all comfortable for her, she thought -- she told me she thought that’s what a bridesmaid was supposed to do; make everybody feel welcome. And I was just so grateful.

She was the -- she was the only one of Jesse’s kids that went to University. And Jesse was so proud of her, just so proud. And she was really into science, and she was just an amazing person. And I don’t know what else to say.

She -- she’s -- she’s missed. She’s still missed. And when I first heard about this Inquiry, the first person I thought of was Linda. Like, why -- how can she just be forgotten? ‘Cause the people that -- that know her never forgot her. But she didn’t have a big circle of friends or family. And I just didn’t want her to be left out.
MS. ELAINE DREAVER: I’m good.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Okay.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: I was just saying that I feel good being here. It actually feels good to talk about her. It’s been years. I mean, it happened back in the 80’s. A lot of time has lapsed. I feel her presence like I said it before. I feel a certain kind of strength that comes with talking about her.

And I’d like to thank everybody here for the opportunity that presents itself here today. And I hope everybody else who presents themselves here today feels the same thing as I do right now. I feel a sense of calmness that I wasn’t excepting to happen so quickly. So thank you. Oh.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Yesterday our conversation kind of -- of course we spoke about Linda, but we also spoke about your own experience growing up.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: M’hm.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Did you want to talk about that today too?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: I hadn’t expected to speak about myself, but I guess it is part of the picture about being First Nations in this country.

My experience was that my mother moved me out of the reservation. We’re Cree. We are from the
Mistawasis Tribe, just -- you too? My father -- my father Henry Dreaver (ph) and my mother Jesse Margaret (ph) came from John Smith Reserve, but we were all registered in Mistawasis. But my mother felt that the life on the reservation was hard, so she moved me out of the reservation two weeks before I was born.

She wanted me to be raised differently than the rest of the family. I -- but when I was younger I looked very Native. I don’t know why, as I get older I seem to mellowed out of it in my features, so I’ve been told. But in my experience in school was as soon as I started to attend school, they labeled me dyslexic without ever teaching me or testing me.

So put me into a seven-year program, which meant that on the sixth year or seventh year of my schooling -- I got held back one year, and my whole experience during elementary to -- to grades, grade 9, I sat at a table in the back of the classroom by myself. I was totally isolated.

And in the first six years, it wasn’t so bad because you got used to being in the same classroom with everybody else even though I -- I was in the back. But come the seventh year, I get held back and now I’m with a bunch of strangers again.

And only until I hit grade 10 did I have the
opportunity to actually mingle and go to classrooms that were separate. I went to Victoria Composite High School. It was an adult training school at that point. And for the first time in my life I had the opportunity to sit where I wanted to sit in a classroom. And I had the opportunity to talk and meet other people.

And I hated school. I absolutely hated school. And came grade 10 I found out that there was teachers out there that knew how to talk to me, or wanted to talk to me, and the last three years were brilliant. I found out that I wasn’t dyslexic. I actually did know all the stuff that I was learning. I had no idea. And for the first time in my life I started going to school willingly.

But my experience for the first nine years was hellish. It was really hellish. And I -- I’m -- I considered my [sic] still fortunate, because I wasn’t in a residential school. And the stories from my family, I’m still very grateful. So to a certain degree I don’t really want to say that my life was rough, because it wasn’t rough.

The only thing that I regret so much is that because my mother’s life was so difficult is that she really wanted to raise me being non-Aboriginal. And I’ve lost so much because of that. And as I grow old, I start realizing how important it is to be proud to be First
And as I was saying a little bit earlier is that deep down I always knew I was First Nations, and I was always proud to be First Nations, but when I looked around the room yesterday, and this morning I felt like -- I feel so un, not First Nations. So -- and it was -- it was terrifying for me.

But as I said a little bit earlier, I’m starting to feel like I am -- I am First Nations, and I am proud to be First Nations. And I want everybody to be feeling like this. I hated the fact that we always felt like second class citizens in our own country.

And again, thank you for allowing me to be proud. And I wish my mother was here to feel it too, you know? Because she tried so hard to make me not be First Nations, and it would be great for her to see that we’re actually taking some of our identity back. You know, my mom, I’m sure she’d be here and strong and happy for all of us.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Do you want to tell us more about your mother?

MS. GAYLE GRAHAM: My mama -- my mama, she was the best thing that ever happened to everybody she met. She -- like I said, she had a hard life. The first man that she married, wanted to -- the first man that fell in
love with was non-Native, and it was the most horrific thing that ever happened to her because the other family did not want to have a First Nations as a -- marrying their son. And at that point, it hit a low for her and she decided that she was no longer proud to be First Nations.

So she packed up all the kids and well, this is years later; she packed up all the kids and moved to Edmonton with hope that she could change and become, how was the word, assimilated into white man’s society, with the great hope that we would have a better chance than what we would have had on the reserve.

And for that I actually thank her, because it did allow me chances and opportunities that I probably would not have had on the reservation. With the consequences of course I’ve lost my -- my ability to be First Nations.

But on the other hand she -- she was the strength in our whole family. We all lived in different places throughout Canada, and every year she’d go on a walk about and visit everybody. And we all got used to seeing her. Everybody back in the res, her sisters, didn’t matter where we lived. She’d just hop on the Greyhound bus or she would hitchhike.

Because we never had the money hitchhiking was the way to do it back then. Back then when it was a
little more safer to do that than it is nowadays.
 Especially in BC where I come from. She always had a smile
 on her face. She was always happy. She never wanted
 anything, she just wanted it all for her kids, which is
 part of being a mother I’m sure.

 But she always had a smile on her face, and
 she was always willing to feed people who came in the door.
 But the, the disappearance of my sister took that all out
 of her. And she had lost three of her other children
 before that too.

 So the last part of her life, she was tired.
 And all she wanted was the Lord to come and take her. And
 eventually he did. But I still choose to remember her with
 a big smile on her face. She always had the face that
 didn’t have the frown. The frown lines were never there.
 Frown lines didn’t exist on this woman’s face.

 And I still love her. She’s been gone 25
 years now, but that’s all I can say about her right now.

 MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Yesterday you
 spoke about Jesse, about a visit that your parents had.
 Did you want to talk about that? I -- I found it a very
 powerful story.

 MS. GAYLE GRAHAM: Okay. Well, this -- this
 story was when -- when I first met Ray (ph), Elaine’s
 brother and Linda’s brother. And we -- we started dating.
And we were talking about getting married, and I wanted my parents to come and meet Jesse. And it was just easier for them to come to her place, because she didn’t drive, and they lived in Sherwood Park.

And so they came -- they came to the door. I was already there. And Jesse invited them in. And we sat around, and we had tea or coffee. Usually tea I’m thinking, because Jesse always drank tea. And then -- so my parents stayed, and we talked for a while. And we talked about a wedding and -- and everything. And then they left. And Jesse came to me and she said, “Your parents are absolutely wonderful people because they didn’t look around my place. They -- they walked in, they sat down, and they acted like it was just normal.”

And you know like I was saying to Joe (ph) yesterday, Jesse thought that because -- I don’t know whether it was because they were white, that -- or that she was uncomfortable about her house. Or whether she was uncomfortable because she was Native. I -- and I -- you know, she -- she was saying that they -- they were really kind.

That -- I don’t -- I kind of got the impression that maybe she expected that they would just look and say, “No, we’re not coming in.” I -- I don’t know. I mean, my parents weren’t like that, but she was --
I -- I was happy that they came over, because Jesse’s place was beautiful.

Like, it was so welcoming, so comfortable.
And I was you know, telling Joe about my parents’ place. I mean, they were like, at various times, you know, my parents had six children. The house was too small, the kitchen was big enough for maybe three, two, three people. So if everybody sat down for supper, the table went out into the living room, because that was the only way everybody could sit around the table.

My mother was not much of a house keeper, so usually it looked like a truck drove through it. And I thought Jesse’s place was just wonderful. And her -- she, like I say, she was just welcoming and smiling and -- and she was you know, all the time I was married to Ray, I mean she was like my best friend.

If -- even when she lived in Vancouver, when my youngest daughter was three, I think three, I had to have surgery. I had to have a hysterectomy, and Jesse flew out from Vancouver and stayed at my place for six weeks. And my house had never been so clean.

But she made the kids happy. She did things with the kids. She just loved them to pieces. And she wouldn’t let me lift anything. You know, she was like my -- when I got home from the hospital, my little daughter
came running up and tried to jump on me, and she was going, “(indiscernible) don’t do that.” She says, “Your mom can’t lift anything.”

And then she would tell me, “Just sit down.”

But she was -- she was that kind of person. And Linda was very much like her, you know? Elaine looks like her, like Jesse; when I look at Elaine. Her face is just like Jesse’s.

And I -- I am so happy to have been married into the Dreaver family and so accepted by them since 1970. It’s been amazing. Hell of a ride, but --

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** I think -- I think we had some photos set up. So there are some, pardon me, some pictures that we have. Did you want to talk about these photographs then? Either of you?

**MS. ELAINE DREAVER:** Yes.

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Go ahead.

Sure.

**MS. ELAINE DREAVER:** The one thing I forgot to say about my mother was that when my mother took us off the reservation, she did it by herself. She took her and her seven children and raised them by being a cleaning lady. All of the kids, by herself. So we usually lived in poorer neighbourhoods, but when we got older, we all decided that we would go to Hawaii together.
So the kids all chipped in, and the three of us went to Hawaii. This was her long-time husband, and the two of us women, we hate having our picture taken. You can tell that we’re not the -- the biggest photography people. Believe it or not though, that was a very happy time.

He looked actually the happiest in the picture there. Yes, but this was our first time abroad too, and not like we got to travel very much in our lifetime there. So but for me it was a very happy time, even though you can’t tell in that picture. It was -- it was amazing time.

The three of us lived together in Vancouver for many, many years. And his name was Stan Orall (ph). My sister is the one in the black dress, and the miserable looking one on the other side is me. And we’re on a boat, on a cruise.

(LAUGHTER)

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Here’s another one.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Yes, again, this one is my mother with Stan Orall and my sister, Linda. It was a very happy occasion. It was a New Year’s Eve which we didn’t typically went out and participated in, but it was such a beautiful time, and I don’t think I’ve ever, ever seen my sister dress up like this before. And I don’t
think I ever, ever saw her do it again.

She was never happy to be any focal point in a room, but that day she was. She was absolutely amazing, and my mother, I’ve never seen her happier. It was a very happy time. And unfortunately, I don’t have an awful lot of pictures of my sister because like I said before, she was not comfortable with her beauty. And there she’s so beautiful.

And this was our trip. Also in Hawaii, she had a parrot on her shoulder. Took the picture, she smiled, and then the bird pooped all over her.

(LAUGHTER)

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: That’s my memory of that day. But it was very fun. It was in Hawaii, again, like I say. Very happy times, and, like I say, you can look at her. She’s -- this was her natural, her look. Her look was just soft and -- and loving. She was a gentle person, a gentle soul. I miss her so much. And that’s how I choose to remember her. She deserved better than what she got. She deserved so much more.

On the upside, my mother and my sister and buried together in the same plot here in Edmonton. My sister went first obviously. My mother went just back in 1992. But that’s the one thing she insisted on, was to be buried with my sister.
And actually, the most poignant thing I can see when I put on the little stone on her grave was if it has no sorrow that heaven can not cure. And I am very grateful the two of them are together now.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don’t know what to say.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: You and me both. Like I say, I’m very happy to be here, and to talk about her. And I’d like to thank everybody. Like I say, so much time has elapsed. And many years has gone by without me trying to think about it. And I just hope that other people get to talk about people that have come and gone in their lives. And to rekindle the memories that made them so special.

Because time has such terrible habit of removing or easing that pain. And to deny the pain is tragic. I think you really have to talk about it, and I’ve never been that kind of a person. And I can see now after all the years of people telling me that I should talk about it, that they are probably right. So yeah. Thank you and thank you mother for having my sister. And thank you for allowing me to be here. And thank you, Mr. Commissioner, for listening to me.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Would you like to say any words about...
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible)

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Okay.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Ditto.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Well, Commissioner, I -- I -- I leave it in your hands at this point. I -- thank you.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: So I don’t have any additional question. I just want to thank you both very much for coming here today and telling us about Linda, and sharing with everybody, you know, what happened. And the bit about your family.

And I want to thank you for -- for showing your strength as well in coming to talk about -- about Linda and your family, so thank you very much.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Thank you.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Remember I said we have surprises?

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: M’hm.

MS. GAYLE GRAHAM: This isn’t a trial run?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So we’re going to ask the Commissioner if he’ll offer you this tobacco here. And this is for you to -- to pray with after here. And to thank you for sharing your words and your truths. We also have another small gift for you. And I know that before we started, we gave you each an eagle feather to -- to hold on
to that bird that flies the closest, to the one that makes us, and we’d like to give you your own eagle feather.

**MS. ELAINE DREAVER:** Oh, thank you.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** And some seeds which are wild sage, one of our medicine’s, so that you can plant these in memory of your families, and that you can have this feather to help you with the rest of your journey. To help you with your healing.

**MS. ELAINE DREAVER:** Thank you. Thank you.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** This will comfort you. These came from the grandmother’s in British Columbia, who on their journeys and their walks, they collected these eagle feathers for the people who would be telling their stories so that it can help give you strength. Because you’ve shown that you have strength, but this will continue to help you.

**MS. ELAINE DREAVER:** M’hm.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** And to help you with your healing, because our loved ones are always going to be here for us. And they want you to know with these feathers that whenever you need them, you just bring out your feather and talk to them and they’ll come and be with you to help you with your journey. So hai’hai (ph).

**COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON:** Okay. And so if there’s nothing further, we can adjourn.
MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Yeah. And --

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Thank you.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Yeah.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Okay.

MS. ELAINE DREAVER: Thank you for the opportunity.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Thank you.

--- Exhibits (code: P1P05P0104)

Exhibit 1: Digital folder of three images displayed on monitors during public hearing.

Exhibit 2: News article “Body in slough still a mystery: Woman disappeared in 1983” by Ian Williams; no publication data, one-page copy.

--- Upon adjourning at 11:07 a.m.

Hearing # 2

Witness: Melanie Dene

In relation to Shelly Tannis Dene

Heard by Chief Commissioner Marion Buller

Commission Counsel: Breen Ouellette

Elders, Grandmothers, Knowledge-Keepers: Rick Lightening, Laureen “Blu” Waters

--- Upon resuming at 1:45 p.m.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Thank you, Chief
Commissioner. For the record, my name is Breen OUELLETTE, and I am a lawyer with the National Inquiry. It is my honour to introduce Melanie Dene, who resides in Edmonton. Melanie has brought someone in support who will I -- who I will ask Melanie to introduce.

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** So Honey, I have brought with me a dear friend of mine. I consider her to be a sister. Her name is Honey Desjarlais (ph). She’s from the Fort McMurray, First Nation, and I am from the Mikisew Cree First Nation and the Treaty 8 Territory.

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Thank you. Ms. Registrar, Melanie has requested to affirm using an eagle feather.

**MELANIE DENE, Affirmed:**

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Melanie --

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Go ahead (indiscernible).

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** -- would you please tell us the full name of the person you are here to speak about today?

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** I am here representing my cousin, Shelly Tannis Dene.

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And are you here today because Shelly is missing, or she’s been murdered?

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** She’s been missing since
August 2013.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Do you know how old she was when she went missing?

MS. MELANIE DENE: She would have been 20 -- 26. She would have been turning 26 that year.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Did Shelly have a difficult life growing up?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Yeah. We -- we’re originally from Fort McMurray, my family. Well, most of us grew up in Fort McMurray. My family comes from Fort Chipewyan area. So Shelly’s father was my uncle, and we all grew up in a place called Water Ways (ph) and Shelly, Candace (ph) and her brother lived there with her mom and her dad. And when, growing up for Shelly was a good upbringing because her dad at that time and my auntie were cultural, and they followed traditional values and ways.

And then the family had split up, and then after that, that’s when the -- the kids had moved with their mom to B.C. and from there a lot of dysfunction I guess you could say happened within the family. So, mainly to do with addictions, alcohol to be more specific, and then eventually drugs.

We moved away, me and my mom had moved away from Fort McMurray when I was about nine. So that was like, the last time that I had seen Shelly as a kid. And
it wasn’t until her father had passed away in 2012 is when I had seen Shelly again. And at that time she -- she was grown up, and she was a mother of her own.

And we connected like, through Facebook, and that’s how you know, like, most of us stay connected; through social media. And so that was my relationship with my cousins that I hadn’t seen since we were all children.

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** And so I understand that Shelly had a son?

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** Yeah. She had -- she -- his name is Ivan (ph). He just turned ten in August. He is in a foster home. He’s been adopted in B.C. Through this whole process, as our family, we try to -- to adopt him. And because that was the only thing that we had of her left. But between the provincial -- I don’t know how it works in the Provinces between B.C. and Alberta; numerous of us that tried to gain custody of Ivan were unable to. And so the family that he was placed with won custody and so now he’s in this home. And we -- we don’t see him. Go ahead, Breen.

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Were you given reasons for why your family’s applications were not accepted?

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** I don’t know what the reasons are, you know? When you -- when you can be able to provide a home for a child, especially when it’s a -- a
member of your family, you would think that the courts
would be more open to placing that child into their family
circle, as opposed to outside of that.

I’m not sure why Ivan was not placed with
you know, Shelly’s auntie who had applied, myself who had
applied, Candace, which is Shelly’s sister. I don’t know
what it is that you need to do or to be recommended, or to
be looked at as a safe home.

Like, I am -- I’m a mother. I have two
daughters myself, and I have another one on the way. You
know I -- I don’t have much, but I have a home, and I have
a lot of love. And I thought that that was enough to be
able to take on Ivan, you know?

I wanted him to -- I know for myself that I
wanted him to be still within our family, and to grow up --
to grow up knowing who we were. And to not ever forget who
his mom was. And I’m not sure if the home that he’s in
does that. I don’t know if they talk to him about who his
mother was. Thank you. Go ahead.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Okay. Do you believe
that Child and Family Services is taking care of the best
interests of Indigenous children and families in British
Columbia and Alberta?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Is that a trick question?
No, I don’t. I don’t believe that the child welfare system
is looking out for the best interests of the Indigenous children that are being apprehended daily from their homes, from their communities.

I feel that that system has replaced residential school system. To remove a child, not just from the home, but from the community is devastating. It’s -- it’s impact, and it just speaks to the volume of colonialism that we are still faced with as Indigenous people.

And you know, because of the conditions that we might not live up to, you know, we may be looked at as in poverty, but just because you live in a run down house or you know, you’re not able to -- I don’t know what it is that they look at, but as long as you’re able to provide a loving, caring home, and you are able to give that child everything that they need, with a roof over their head, food in their belly, to keep them safe from addictions and stuff like that, then you know, does that make you any less of a parent?

I think, I think children need to be, to be in their homes, and they need to be within their family, within their family circle. And especially within their community.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: You mentioned poverty as a potential factor for denying families the right to
care for their -- their children. All things being equal
between the extended family of a child, or a stranger in
foster care, except for perhaps the poverty issue; do you
believe it makes sense to pay that stranger thousands of
dollars rather than to support the family to allow them to
continue to raise that child?

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** Do I think that makes
sense? No. It doesn’t make sense. I would be considered
poverty. I am a University student. I -- I go to school
full time. I’m living off of student loan, and the child
tax benefit that the govern [sic] gives to me. I would be
considered poverty, and I have two children, and another
one on the way. Does that make me less of a person to
raise my own children that way?

No, because I’m still doing everything I
possibly can every damn day to ensure that my kids needs
are being met. I ensure that the -- the rent is paid. I
struggle to pay utilities, but I do it. You know, I -- I
reach out to -- to my friends and to support to help me to
-- whenever I need that help.

I don’t -- I don’t rely on -- I don’t rely
the -- my Band or you know? Like, I always try to find a
way to make ends meet, and I’ve been doing it. And I’m, I
feel that a lot of families, a lot of mothers and a lot of
fathers, they do that. They -- they struggle. Yeah, sure
we struggle, but as long as those needs are being met then that doesn’t make you any less of a parent, and it doesn’t make you any less worthy to raise your own children.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Can you tell us what Shelly’s life was like leading up to her disappearance?

MS. MELANIE DENE: So like I said, Shelly and her siblings and her mom had moved to -- to B.C. where she grew up most of her teenage life. Shelly had -- she had dropped out of high school, and then when she became pregnant with her son, that gave her the drive to go back to school and to finish, which she did. As you can see, she graduated.

She -- she had her own place, she had her own vehicle. You know, she did everything and it’s like I said, as a mother you do everything for your children. And that’s what Shelly was doing. She -- she put aside you know, her -- her addictions. Like, she was drinking and doing drugs beforehand, but when she had Ivan she -- that was her focus, was her son.

And so she had graduated, and then when Shelly’s father had passed away, that was the first time I -- I remember meeting little Ivan. And he was -- he was super cute. He was so cute. And she said that she wanted to further, like, further on into school. Looking for work and stuff like that. She was just trying to you know, plan
her life on what she wanted to do to ensure that she could
make a life for him.

And then the last I heard of like, Shelly
was that she had -- she had relapsed, and that was the
first time that Ivan was taken away. And so if anything
that -- that kind of woke her up. And so she, you know,
she cleaned herself up again and she -- she worked hard,
and she always made sure that she made her appointments to
-- to visit with him.

She was doing what she could do in order to
get her son back. And she stayed sober for -- for three
years. And, but I don’t know; child welfare system I
guess, you know, they -- they get to determine when you’re
okay, and when they feel that your child should be returned
to you. And for Shelly, that was really hard for her.

And so during that time she decided to get
away from B.C. because that’s where a lot of the temptation
I guess, was, the influence. So she had moved here to
Edmonton. And she came to live here with our -- our
grandmother. And she moved here in May of that year.

And she wanted to clean up her life. And
she wants to figure out what she had to do in order to get
her son back. And she figured that being around family
would help her. And that year, that summer, I had come
down In July from -- at that time I was living in Fort
McMurray. And I had come to Edmonton, and I stopped at my grandmother’s place. And I didn’t even know Shelly was here.

And I was sitting there visiting with my grandma, and all of a sudden Shelly came out and I was like, “What the heck?” You know, like, “What are you doing here?” And I just couldn’t believe like, how tall she was ‘cause like, the last time I had seen her was in 2001. And yeah, she -- she was really tall. She was beautiful. And I gave her a big hug, and you know, and asked her what she was doing here. She said, “I’m -- I’m living here now. I’m just trying to get my life together.”

And so we kind of chit chatted, but I could tell that Shelly was very, kind of distracted. She was on her phone. And that was the last time that I had seen her myself. And it was in August the next month that my mom had called me, and she told me that Shelly was missing. And I was like, “What do you mean she’s missing?” And she said, “I don’t know.” She’s like, “We haven’t seen her. We haven’t heard from her. She’s gone.”

And so I asked like, “Did you go to the police? Did anybody go to the police?” And at that time, Candace, her sister was the one that went to go file the -- the complaint with the Edmonton Police, but they didn’t file it. They basically said that she’s probably just out
Hearing – Public
Melanie Dene
(Shelly Tannis Dene)

doing what any young girl’s doing. Or that maybe because
Shelly was at that time talking about going to the Yukon,
and so they assumed that maybe she had just took off to the
Yukon.

So they didn’t you know, they didn’t take it
seriously. And Candace knew something was wrong because
she talked to her sister like, almost every day. And when
she doesn’t talk to her, that’s what worried her.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: So when you say that
they wouldn’t file a report, are you referring to the
Edmonton Police Service?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Edmonton Police Services,
yes. They didn’t file the report. It wasn’t until
November of 2013 that they finally filed her as a missing
person.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Why do you think it
took them so long to file that report?

MS. MELANIE DENE: ‘Cause she’s Indigenous.
Because they labeled her as high risk. I don’t know. Why
wouldn’t the police file her? Why do they not file them
right away? Why do they wait, take their time? Like,
three months is too long.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Do you know if
Candace, tried reporting Shelly missing to Edmonton Police?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Yeah. Candace was --
Candace should have been a cop. She was on them all the time. She -- she wanted to know where her sister was because she knew that something wasn’t right. Like I said that Candace talked to her sister every day, and when she -- she would try to text her. She would call.

She even went as far to see if like, Shelly was using her bank card, or if her status card had been used or you know, she was doing everything to figure out like, what happened to her sister, even Facebook. Like, she reached out to Shelly’s friends to see if Shelly maybe went back to B.C.

Like, she was just trying to figure out where it did -- what -- like, what happened to her sister. And Candace said that the last time that she -- she texted Shelly, and she asked her if everything was okay. And the -- the response back was, “No.” And then when she tried to call, the phone was disconnected, so (indiscernible) Candace. That’s when she knew like, something -- something was seriously wrong. That (indiscernible) help.

But it’s like I said that the police, they, in my -- in my own opinion, they -- they waited too long. Like, three months is -- that’s a long time to -- that they could have been out looking. You know, posters could have been up. They could have put it out on, out on the news. They could have put it on social media. You know, try to
help the family, take the family serious. And when they report somebody that they love is gone missing --

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Do you know if Candace tried contacting the RCMP in British Columbia?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Yeah. She contacted the police in B.C. She talked to the police in the Yukon. She -- I even believe she was sending the missing person posters up (indiscernible) different detachments. Like, she was -- like I said, she was (indiscernible) the police -- (indiscernible) she couldn’t have been. It should have been the police doing their job, basically.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Do you know if she got any better response from the RCMP in B.C. than Yukon?

MS. MELANIE DENE: From what I can remember, Candace said that they had questioned, but you can’t quote me on that, but that would be, have to come from Candace.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: So what has the family done on its own to try to raise awareness?

MS. MELANIE DENE: We’ve had walks. We put out posters. We’ve created Facebook pages. We spoke to media multiple times. I even put up a ceremony last fall for her. And not just for her, but for all murdered and missing women. I’ve been praying. I don’t know, like, what does the family do?

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Can you tell us why
Candace is unable to be here today?

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** Like Shelly, Candace too was heavily into addictions. And then when her sister went missing she sobered up, and she sobered up fast. She was -- she was the strength behind all of this. This was her big sister.

And if she didn’t do it, Shelly probably would have been forgotten. So Candace got sober, and this was -- this was her -- this was her mission being a mom herself, and she was trying to go to school also. She lived in Fort McKay at the time. And she -- she just, I don’t know, she just got engaged. Like, her sister -- finding her sister was like, her work, her every day work.

She got in contact with some of the grassroots movements. You know, like, Stolen Sisters, Murdered Missing Indigenous Women, she just reached out, and on June 21st, the following year after Shelly had been reported missing, she held a walk here in Edmonton for Shelly.

And then from there, you know, she held a walk in Peace River. She -- she did everything. She talked to CBC. She talked to all the media. Probably half the reporters that might be in here, Candace probably talked to them. She did everything that she possibly could, and we had a fire back in Fort McMurray a little
over a year ago. And from there, you know, a lot of us moved.

Candace moved back to B.C. She was expecting to go back to Fort McKay, because she -- she was going to school. And I think it just -- this place a toll on you, you know? And it’s not something very easy to carry. Every day you wake up, you know, your loved one is the first thing you think about.

So Candace currently is in recovery, because she had fallen off. She’s -- but she’s working on herself, and you know, I -- I don’t look down on her. I don’t judge her, because what she did for a young person herself, like, she’s in her early 20’s, and to do what she was doing on behalf of her sister, that to me shows me love, you know?

And I talk with her every now and then, and like, today I -- I talked to her this morning, and I told her I was coming here. And all she could say was, “Thank you and I love you.” She said, I’m -- because she’s not in a place right now where she can do this. Can’t carry this.

And I think it’s important that, you know, and I told her that that, “It’s important that I continue what you were doing,” and that I don’t want Shelly to ever be forgotten. I want her to be found. That’s the only thing my family has ever -- ever wanted, has ever asked for, was for her to come home.
In some way, we just -- we want her home. We want to know what happened to her. I can’t fathom in my mind how someone goes missing. I just, I can’t fathom it. It doesn’t make any sense to me. How does somebody go missing and like, four years, this is the fourth winter. And I just -- it’s not easy, it’s not something that you know, they say, “Oh, in time.” No. It’s not like that.

And when you -- when you read on the news or you hear on the news about another farm that they have found in B.C. with human remains, that makes your heart stop, because you wonder if your loved one is there. And in a way, you kind of pray that maybe she is, so that at least you have some sort of answer.

Or if they find another victim, you know, that’s what my -- me and my family live through when reports like that are -- are being broadcasted. I don’t think anybody should have to live like that.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: What were Shelly’s gifts and strengths?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Shelly was -- she was very determined. She had her own dreams. I think her strength was her son, Ivan. She was kind. She -- she was beautiful. When her father was sick, she had drove all the way from B.C. and she came, and she sat by his side until he had passed.
She -- she wanted whatever any young mother wanted, you know? A young woman. When you’re a young lady, like, in your 20’s, ‘cause I’ve been there, you know, that’s when you’re -- you’re discovering who you are as an individual. And you’re trying to figure out your -- your own dreams and what it is that you want to do in -- in life.

And when you have children you know, it makes it that much more that you -- you want to better yourself. And I believe that’s what she -- she was attempting to do. Like, she -- she -- that’s why she had moved here, to Edmonton of all places.

I wish she would have came and lived in Fort McMurray, or Fort McKay, because she -- maybe she would still be here today.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: What do you hope will happen as a result of your testimony today?

MS. MELANIE DENE: I hope that Shelly’s case is re-opened. When we reported her missing, when they finally filed her missing in November of 2013, it was a year later, December that the police basically said that they exhausted everything that they could do. I’m not sure what that means, ‘exhausted’. It makes me question like, what they were actually doing, because if Candace was doing their job, you know, what were they actually doing as law
enforcement?

But I want to see her case re-opened, and I want to see it active. And I -- I would love for the police to be in contact with us, her family, on a daily basis, even a weekly basis to tell us what it is, you know? I -- I -- I just, I don’t feel like -- and I you know, yeah, I know that they’re overworked, and they have million other cases and things to do as police officers, but perhaps develop a special task force that just deals with cases like this; where they can actually do their jobs properly, and they can spend that time efficiently and effectively on each of these cases, because I’m so tired of, not just Shelly, but other cases too like, being disregarded, forgotten about, or exhausted. So --

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: And to be clear, this special task force, you -- you would want to deal exclusively with Indigenous missing and murdered cases?

MS. MELANIE DENE: I think that’s a high priority right now. Yeah. I think it needs to be like that across this whole country, not just here in Edmonton. But you know, they -- they say that they have projects, special KARE here in Edmonton, but even what is that doing? You know, still young women are going missing or being murdered, so how effective is this Project KARE?

I would like to -- to see an independent
task force that works specifically just with Indigenous peoples that go missing or who have been murdered.

**Mr. Breen Ouellette:** We’ve talked previously, and you had mentioned something about safety in cities. Do you want to talk about that?

**Ms. Melanie Dene:** This is when we met back in October or September when I came and met with you. I talked about my safety. I talked about -- yeah, I think I -- I -- since Shelly has been gone missing, it’s been my reality now as an Indigenous woman, I don’t feel safe. I don’t go anywhere. I go to school, and I stay home, and I do what I need to do during the day.

I have daughters you know? And I fear for their safety. I don’t even like them playing outside because I have in my mind what if somebody comes and takes them?

I -- I don’t like that feeling. Even being on campus, you know? Being a -- walking on campus, or walking anywhere really, even traveling. When I travel to Saskatchewan, I travel during the day and I always have to ensure whoever on the other end where I am -- like, I text along the way just to let them know where I am, because what if something happens to me?

Is that normal? Is that a normal way to behave? You know, I’ve never done that before. And I feel
like I shouldn’t have to live my life that way, in fear.
And I feel like I’m not the only Indigenous woman that
feels that way.

It’s not a nice feeling. I’m angry all the
time. I’ve been angry. Racism, colonial violence. Like
even as Indigenous women like, when you -- you read about
these stories, the -- the murdered victims like, the way
that they’re murdered is, it’s like out of rage? Hate? I
don’t know.

Like, it’s not where somebody just got shot,
or you know, got hit by a car, or I don’t know. I’m not
saying there’s a proper way to kill somebody, but I’m just
saying that when it comes to being an Indigenous person,
why is it more violent and disgusting, the way that they’re
killed?

And -- their crimes aren’t even being
solved. They’re lucky if they can even convict somebody of
their crime. Look at the wave -- the victims of Robert
Pickton, you know? Or Cindy Gladue. You know, like, why
are women being murdered in that way and people just seem
to be okay with it. Like, why is that? Like, why are
Canadians okay with the way that these women are being
treated? If they were of another colour would it been,
have, be different? Would there be more outrage in the
public?
Why is it just Indigenous people that come together and raise these issues and try to bring it to the light, to the forefront to help the rest of Canada understand what it is that we are facing? This is not just -- this is not just a, you know, like a passing of time. This has been going on for a very, very long time. So that’s how I feel.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Do you believe then that’s it’s important for safe spaces to be created in cities across this country?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Yeah. I would like to see more safe spaces for Indigenous people, not just women and girls, but even for our men, our boys. You know, a lot of these people that come to the urban centres, they’re escaping from something. And they come here, and they don’t have places to go.

And -- and I’m not saying that you know, they’re all like that, but even for myself being here in Edmonton, I would like to have a safe space if I chose to go. You know, like, even a place to go for a ceremony. Like, I would like to have places like that set up for here in the urban centres.

I think that, you know, yeah, they have women shelters, and you know, they’re so quick to always point the fingers to those types of places, but beds are
They don’t have access to Elders. Resources, you know, like a lot of people don’t know where to go for certain things.

So I think if you can be able to create spaces like that specifically for Indigenous people, then you know, I think that would -- that would help, in a way.

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Do you believe there’s a power imbalance or a lack of fairness in the struggle of Indigenous mothers and parents against Child and Family Services?

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** Oh, Breen. Yeah. Of course there’s a power imbalance. It’s always been about power, and who holds that power. You see it. Like, I’m learning about it in University. It’s in our history. It’s you know, Elders talk about it. We’ve seen it with residential school. We’ve seen it with the Indian Act, and still see it with the Indian Act.

We see it within the reserve systems. And child welfare system like, who gave them that much power just to -- to come in? Like, I -- I recall watching a documentary on APTN, and it’s, I think it was in Winnipeg. And it was a young mom who was also a product of the child welfare system. When she became a mother, her baby was taken away from her. Why? Because she -- she grew up in the system, so automatically that like, strikes her as like
she’s not like, a mother? Like, she can’t be a mom?

So yeah, it’s -- to me it’s just another act of dispossession. You know, continue to keep us in a certain situation to keep us in poverty, to keep us down. To keep us still struggling, to keep us within our addictions. You know, that it’s always going to be that way, unless like, for myself I -- I used to be an alcoholic. And did that make me a bad mom? No, because I still went to work and you know, I still managed to make sure that my kids had the things that they -- they needed, but I knew I had a problem.

But it took me a long time to realize that and you know, I -- I found my place, and I -- I found myself in ceremony. That’s what I returned back to. And that’s what has been helping me these past three and a half years. And without returning back to that, I think I -- I could have been Shelly. I could have been another one of the -- the victims, but yeah. I don’t know.

This is -- this is a struggle that we -- we face. And Indigenous women seen to be targeted because it’s not just mothers with their children being taken away and apprehended at birth, it’s also women that are getting sterilized without their consent. There’s a lot of things that are happening, and you know, I wish people would educate themselves, and make the connections of to what is
actually happening.

Like, why is there such a increase in prison systems when there should be more increase in programs and services to help families, to help Indigenous people?

Yeah. I could go on, but --

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Do you think some of that help should be in the form of somebody that can help Indigenous parents stand up against child welfare so that they’re not just at the mercy of that system?

MS. MELANIE DENE: I think that’s where it’s important to have community. And it’s important to have Elders. And like Cindy Blackstock, you know, she -- she’s a true advocate. And she wasn’t just speaking on behalf of just one province. She was speaking on behalf of all of the children that have been taken away, and that are continuously being taken away.

She’s talking for our, all of our children. All of the Indigenous children that are being impacted. Something like women like her, people like her, you know? Those are the people that you want in your corner to -- to help you fight this battle that it is that Indigenous people are fighting. Listen, man, we’ve been fighting for a really, really, really, really long time. And it’s not just within child welfare system, it’s in all systems.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: What are your hopes
for Ivan?

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** My hopes for Ivan? I hope that he knows that he’s loved. I hope that he knows that he’s not forgotten by his family. I hope that he remembers who his mom is. I hope that he -- he hears -- when he hears about her that he hears the good things about his mom, and the things that she did for him.

I hope that he’s loved. I hope that he has a connection to -- to Creator, you know? To -- to our Indigenous way of life. I hope he has that, so that he doesn’t ever forget who he is. I hope he’s doing good in school. I hope he’s happy. I hope, you know, like, he’s a little boy. And I hope one day that his mom can be found so that he’s not sitting where I’m sitting in the future.

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** I will now ask the Chief Commissioner if she has any questions for Melanie.

**CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** It’s okay. Take your time.

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** Thank you.

**CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** First of all, I’d like to know the story about each of the pictures that you have here today about, of Melanie. Oh, sorry.

**MS. MELANIE DENE:** Shelly.

**CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER:** Shelly. I’m sorry. Melanie, please tell me about Shelly’s
MS. MELANIE DENE: This picture here is her graduation photo. So that’s when she had graduated from upgrading. This photo here, I stole this one from Candace. But Candace said this was a trip that they had taken in B.C. I think this one might have been in Vernon. And so Candace was the one that took that picture. And the picture I’m wearing is -- this was the last time Candace spent a day with her sister. It was for Candace’s daughter, Matea (ph) her birthday. And Candace took this picture of Shelly. And so this is a picture I use when I purchase a (indiscernible) in the walks or just raising awareness.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Thank you. I have a few questions about your experiences in trying to adopt Ivan. What do you remember about the process of paperwork, of telephone calls, that sort of thing?

MS. MELANIE DENE: So this is when I was still living in Fort McMurray. From what -- so my family, there was Candace, my mom, my uncle, my uncle, I mean my aunt, my Auntie Jean (ph) and her sister were the ones that were more so involved. They were meeting with Athabasca Tribal Council. They were utilizing the child support system that ATC offers, because they -- this was before the
finalisation of adoption for Ivan. And so the family were wanting to be able to give -- be given the opportunity to adopt Ivan.

So they were working with the support of ATC and that they were having like, meetings over the phone with the B.C. child welfare system, and with the family that had -- had Ivan at the time. And so it like, there was a process, and my auntie, she -- she was the one that had put her name forward, and like, she had a home in Fort McKay. She had a job. You know, she had all of the means in order to take care of Ivan.

And just like I said, I don’t know what the dynamic is between the provinces like, the whole relationship there between child welfare system. Very different it seems. B.C. seems to be impossible to work with. But I -- I can recall when me and Candace were talking on the phone, and she was telling me about all of this, and I was like, well, what if I put my name forward? You know, because I had a good job, I was sober. I had a vehicle. I had a home. You know, like, I have two kids of my own. I thought why not? Like I could do this, you know? Then at least he’s here. And he’s close to all of us.

And so she was like, “Well, come to -- come to a meeting then.” And so I went. I went to one of the
meetings that we had at ATC. And I couldn’t believe the conversation like, how the conversation went about. It just seemed like the lady that represented the woman in B.C. like, she was fighting us. Like, the family, you know? In order for Ivan to stay with her.

And as a child of welfare worker you would think that you would be fighting for the family. Like, wanting to keep the child with his biological family. But it wasn’t like that at all. It was a very frustrating conversation. It got very heated. It seemed like they were controlling everything. And you know, the family that he’s with is a non-Indigenous family. So he’s been placed in the home of, sorry, white people.

And so it just, like, what? You know, like, does that make them better parents because of the colour of their skin? Or because they -- they raised Ivan for what, three years? That makes them more eligible? Like, we’re his biological family, and he’s all we have left of Shelly. And to me I would think that both like, Alberta and B.C. would try to work with our family in order to get Ivan back where he can be -- be with us.

And you know, like, we didn’t just lose Shelly, we lost him too. And that’s hard. Like, at least we know where he is, but we shouldn’t have to lose both of them.
CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: How did that meeting end? Do you remember?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Well, he’s not with us. So I think to me like, from thinking back, I don’t have a very good memory right now. I’m pregnant so bear with me. But I think like, but it seemed like it was like a stalling tactic, you know? Like, dragging out the process so that the family could be the ones to successfully win in the adoption.

Like, I don’t even know if they even put my application forward. Like, I have no idea. And you know, no follow up. It was just basically he’s there. Like, he -- they won. They got him. And I know that when Candace moved back to B.C. after the fire, like, she would call, and she would make visits and go visit -- visit with him.

And my grandmother like, she used to always have phone calls with him too. I don’t even know if that’s still going on. I -- I don’t -- I don’t know. But yeah, like, we used to get pictures of him. Like, I have a picture of him at home, but that’s not enough, you know? It would be nice if we could have him for Christmas or -- and I understand like, you know, they always say, “Well, we look out for the best interest of the child.” Like, if he doesn’t know who we are, but who’s fault is that?

Like, if you’re not opening the door for
him to be able to be learning about who we are, making that
time, putting that effort in for him to come and visit,
then of course you know, he’s going to like, not know who
we are. And he’s going to be scared. But I feel that,
that’s what they do. So --

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Thank
you. I have no other questions.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Melanie, is there
anything else you’d like to share with the Chief
Commissioner today?

MS. MELANIE DENE: I -- I think that for me
during this -- this whole four years going down this road,
you know, with the rallies, the marches, the -- the
interviews, we’ve come to a place now like, where it’s been
pushed for an Inquiry. And we’re here. And I -- I respect
you know, that what the Government is doing, but my biggest
question is what is the Government planning to do after
this Inquiry? Like, what is the action plan?

Because I hope it’s not like another R Cap
report. I hope it’s not 94 calls to action, where we have
roundabout circle talks about reconciliation. Like, what
is the action plan? And I want to see the courts, I want
to see the police system, I want to see the enforcement you
know, be examined, and looked at, because there is so much
racism against Indigenous people within just that one
system, but it’s within all the systems, that I’m just trying to really understand like, what is the Inquiry going to do?

And I’m not just placing that all on to the Government, but I’m like, what is Canada, all of Canada going to do? Canadians, you know. I feel like the -- it’s the Indigenous people that are always having to push and push and push and we’re vocal, and you know, like, look at Idle No More. And look at Standing Rock, and look at now in B.C. with Kinder Morgan. It’s -- and with the Murdered Missing Indigenous Women.

Like, why -- why does it always have to like, come to that point where we have to be in the face, and demand to get to this point? Like, I -- I want a world where my daughters can be safe. I -- I want them to have the same as, just like anybody else. I want them to have a future. I don’t want my -- my daughters to feel that they’re looked at differently just because of who they are.

I want them to be proud to be able to be -- say, “I am an Indigenous woman. I’m (indiscernible).” You know, I want them to have that sense of security. I don’t want them to be looked at any less than. And I’m trying to understand like, how do we get there? You know, so I know that’s a very loaded question and -- but that’s what goes on in my mind.
CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Well, thank you. I’m having much of the same questioning in my head too and I’m hoping you’ll give me the answers. Thank you so much for coming today and telling us about Shelly and Ivan, and the rest of your family.

We look upon what you’ve told us, and what other families and survivors tell us, and it’s really giving us sacred gifts, the memories and the stories and -

MS. MELANIE DENE: M’hm.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: -- and the truths. The matriarchs on Haida Gwaii in British Columbia sometime ago heard about what we are going to be doing all across Canada. And they wanted a way to recognize and honour families and survivors who come forward, because they know the grief that -- the pain that families are going through, and survivors are going through.

So they ordered, as only matriarchs can, that eagle feathers be harvested and -- and that happened. And they’ve asked us to give families and survivors who come forward an eagle feather on their behalf, to lift you up, to give you strength and -- and to honour you.

So we have an eagle feather for you. My Elder assistant Kathy is going to help me here. Just one, thanks. Yeah. We have one also for your friend who --
MS. MELANIE DENE: Oh, she went to pick up my daughter.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Oh, she did? Okay. Well, we have one for you and also one for your friend, because we know family includes family of the heart.

MS. MELANIE DENE: Oh, okay.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Oh, we’re not done yet. Also, we have -- oh, you have them? Oh, thank you so much. Oops, I’m sorry, I (indiscernible). Because we believe in ceremony and the importance of tradition, we have tobacco ties for you and your friend, and also, and exchange for the sacred gift you gave us, we wanted to give you and your friends seeds to plant.

Seeds we know have a lot of significance in a lot of different ways all across Canada. So would you please plant them --

MS. MELANIE DENE: M’hm.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: -- take a picture of what happens and send it to us?

MS. MELANIE DENE: Okay.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: And thank you again.

MS. MELANIE DENE: Thank you.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: It’s been
a real honour to hear from you.

MS. MELANIE DENE: Thank you.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: And good luck.

MS. MELANIE DENE: Thank you.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Chief Commissioner -- Chief Commissioner, I request that you adjourn this hearing at your pleasure.

CHIEF COMMISSIONER MARION BULLER: Yes, we’ll take about a 15-minute break, please.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Thank you.

--- Upon adjourning at 3:00 p.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Anja Curuvija, 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.

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Anja Curuvija

February 11, 2018