National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Public Hearings
Edmonton Inn – Courtyard Ballroom
Edmonton, Alberta

PUBLIC

Thursday November 9, 2017

Public Volume 24

Wilton Littlechild, Treaty 6 Grand Chief, CM, AOE, MSC, QC;

Vanessa Corado & Muriel Whiteman, In relation to Freeda Alvina Whiteman, Ashley Young & Brandy Wesaquate;

Joanne Ahenakew,
In Relation to Laura Ann Ahenakew & Bernadette Ahenakew

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Association  Non-appearance

Women of Metis Nation / Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak  Non-appearance

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 – Courtyard Ballroom (i.e. Public # 1)
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**Witnesses: Vanessa Corado and Muriel Whiteman**

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**Witness: Joanne Ahenakew**

Exhibits (code: P1P05P0302)
--- Upon commencing on Thursday, November 9, 2017 at 9:09 a.m.

MS. DEBBIE REID: Thank you very much for your opening words. I'd like to now call up someone that is not a stranger to these parts, is not a stranger to people out there. The Grand Chief of Treaty 6, Mr. Willie -- I always used to just call him "commissioner," so -- would you like to come up, Grand Chief?

MR. WILTON LITTLECHILD: Well, good morning. (Speaking in Native language). I just begin by greeting each and every one of you with a very special thanks to my sister for her opening invocation but also her powerful message. Kinanâskomitîn (speaking in Native language). Thank you.

At the opening of the session the other night, I mentioned there was some work that I think we should acknowledge, as well, and not only acknowledge but perhaps consider in our search for solutions, in our search for solution.

So I -- upon reflection, after leaving the opening session, I jotted down some -- some thoughts that I wanted to share with you, and first of all, of course, is to thank you very, very much, to thank the witnesses who
have come in front of the commissioners, the courage of the families, the commissioners, and also the -- the staff who are working, the Fire-keepers who are out there, I was talking with them this morning, but also those that are not here, those that are not here to -- to participate directly but are supporting the work. I know that they're supporting your work in a great way -- many times, "simply" is not the right word, but just by prayer helping this work. I'm told many times that there's prayer circles being held, there's elders praying for us in their own -- in their own way, so I thank all of those people to begin with, and I'm honored to say a few more words this morning.

In a way, it's amazing what's happening around us as we discuss these very difficult stories and hear the stories about the events that are happening around the world, and I'll just mention a couple of them.

I'm also honored to be here because I was raised by my grandparents, and I was taught about the important role of men and boys in these situations, and when I connect that to the hearings that we had with the Truth Commission and Elders told us, for example, the importance -- I mentioned the other night the importance of going back to the culture and our teachings, and old people -- in an honourable way, I say that term "old
people" -- our Elders, our seniors, reminded us about sacred teachings and ceremony.

For example, I'm not one with authority to talk fully about the rites of passage ceremony for boys. I participate with my wife and participated with my wife when our own daughters were going through ceremony, but a sad thing happened on one of those ceremonies. She got reported to the Labour Board, and the reason she was reported to the Labour Board was she invited all the other nurses to come and witness the ceremony, and people thought that's not something that should be done during work or with workers, but that's only part of the story.

The other more important part for me is the boys and men side, the ceremonies that are held for boys as well. During that ceremony, the old people -- these are not my words, I'm sharing with you what I heard as a commissioner in that truth and reconciliation journey -- they say to us that there are sacred teachings that we have, and we follow them during our commission work as a theme for each of the national events, but there are two teachings in particular, they said, that are very important for us to return to and live out in these instances that might help, and the first teaching, of course, is respect, the sacred teaching of respect. We started our hearings with that teaching.
So we learn that it's not only respect about self but respect about others, respect about property, respect about laws, respect about family, so that teaching needs to be returned back to and instilled with our young boys, they said.

And the other teaching, and I'm glad my sister mentioned it, is one I thought would be not only very difficult, but it -- I thought I'm not sure if this is going to work because of the stories that we heard, and that's the sacred teaching of love. Love.

And then throughout the hearings, we heard stories about first they said, I hate myself, I hate that I'm brown-skinned or I'm Indian, I'm ashamed of myself; but then things turned. They changed, and in my view, in my opinion, the truth and reconciliation journey also changed on those days; when a woman came in front of us and said, you know, I can get up in the morning now, and I look myself in the mirror, and I say to myself, I love you, I couldn't do that before.

We heard about the loss of parental skills because of residential school with many and that discovery of the courage to say that again. People said, you know, for the first time I can now turn to my spouse or my partner and say to them, I love you. For the first time now, I can say to my children -- couldn't do this before --
I love you. Now I can say that to my grandchildren, I love you, and that message that received from the witnesses, the Elders, I think are two that we can reflect on on this journey, the journey of trying to find our sisters that are missing, trying to find how they passed on to the spirit journey those that are no longer with us, that these are teachings that we must go back to, old people said.

So I share that -- that with you because I think that was an important information that we received from our set of hearings that I wanted to share with you.

But the other part I wanted to share with you was that -- I mentioned it the other day -- my work at the United Nations, when I raised the issue of the murdered and missing women and girls, and also, now there's a call, also -- you heard it the other night -- about including boys and men in that. At one time in another commission that I sat on, I went to every prison, the men's prisons, the women's prison, the Federal prison, the Provincial prison, the mandatory or the youth detention centres and looked at that situation and discovered a lot of teachings there as well. So we need to make the link, I said, at the other event in the evening. The residential school legacy is linked to this story as well.

So I then learned at the United Nations after I introduced the idea -- or not the idea, I'm
sorry -- the issue. I was asked by the president of the
women. I didn't want to be in a position that I'm speaking
for women because I want that never to be done by me.
That -- it needs to be done by yourself as women, but she
asked me, she said, I have to go home, there's been a death
in my family, so can you raise this issue at the UN? So I
did, and then after that, at every session of the Permanent
Forum and at every session of the Expert Mechanism, I sat
at those level of discussions for 12 years to make sure
that the issue of women was always mainstreamed in every
topic.

And then I discovered that there was an
opportunity to lead a resolution on violence against women,
and Canada lead that discussion, so I want to pay tribute
again to the Ambassador McCarney, for example, in the
Geneva Mission For Canada because they lead the discussion
at the UN on the resolution of violence against women.

But last year as I mentioned before was the
first time that the United Nations agreed to have a special
session. They agreed to have a -- what's called a
high-level panel at the UN with a specific focus on
violence against Indigenous women and girls, and I've
worked now 40 years at the UN, and that was the
most -- probably the highest honour, I would say, I had of
chairing a UN meeting of the Human Rights Council on this
Hearing – Public
Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild

topic because as I said at the opening, this is not only a
national issue, it's a global issue, so we need to join
efforts with our sisters from around the world.

So the special session that was held at the
UN in September was adopted by the Human Rights Council.
There's a resolution now that we should be mindful of in
the search of solutions, and also last couple of days, and
I think they just wrapped up last night, as well, there
were discussions in Toronto by an organization looking at
the root causes of the violence against Indigenous women.
Of course, we know the colonialism, the oppression, the
discrimination that you as women face is a continued
experience here in Canada, but it also calls on us to
continue to work to resolve the situation.

So we as Indigenous men, myself as a
Grand Chief for Treaty 6, I feel we have a very important
role to support your work, to support the panel's work and
also the organization against family violence. It's a
national Aboriginal circle against family violence, and
they, too, are in search of solutions.

So I'm here as a Chief; I'm here as a
father, husband, a grandfather to support your cause, to
support your work, because I think sometimes we've been
missing in terms of our voice of support.

So one of the things I did, and I referred
to it on Monday, is we did a canvas of all the international law, all the human rights law, and did a report. It's actually a 58-page report, which I understand that you've been given a copy of, that outlines all the existing international law on this issue. That should help us. It should help us because Canada has ratified those conventions, Canada has endorsed those declarations, Canada has made public commitments both federally and provincially, but also equally importantly, Indigenous organizations, Chiefs have endorsed those international instruments, those international norms and standards, in fact, international laws.

So when I served as a commissioner for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we heard about the impacts of residential school on Indigenous women, but I know that you've already heard about that.

I was awoke -- woken up by a young woman early in our discussions when she said, you know, I really appreciate that you are talking about what happens to the child when you take them away from their parents, what happens to the parents from whom you've taken the children away. She said, I applaud that, I see that it's in your logo and in your documents, and she said, what about us? What about us that came after? And she was talking about the intergenerational trauma, and it really expanded our
work and our view after that question was raised by a young woman during our hearings.

So we look to you now to help us to continue what my sister talks about in terms of the healing. I'm really encouraged by what I see across the country about the engagement. We're in a new time. We're in a new era. It's a short window of opportunity, but this is our time to make -- to make change.

So I want to just refer you to -- to the international law regarding specifically violence against women, and in particular, Indigenous women that we've submitted to you, and just for the record, the -- there are actually 11 articles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous issue that deal with this matter squarely: The Universal Declaration on Human Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; The Convention on Rights of the Child; The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; The Convention Against Torture; the ILO Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. All of this, these international laws, refer to this issue, so it's not a lack of law. It's not a lack of a legal frame work. It's a lack of implementation, and that's what
we need to call on to be done as a part of the solution.

At the Permanent Forum, for example, they made a conclusion after reviewing all of the legislation. They said, and I quote:

"Indigenous women play an integral role in all aspects of economic and social development, and in order for Indigenous peoples to advance the effective implementation of the declaration, violence against Indigenous women must be eradicated."

So that's a very strong instruction from the United Nations. The Inter-American system, the OAS, the Organization of American States, who also recently adopted a declaration, there are two elements to it that are very, very important because it's the first time this international recognition by law has been adopted, and it's about the Indigenous family. For the first time under international law, Indigenous family is recognized, and I think that's significant in these discussions.

Secondly, it's the first time that Indigenous laws are recognized. So when you put the traditional teachings that we're advised to go back to by our Elders, the ones that spoke in front of us, to go back to the teachings
about love, are now supported by international law. It's there, and we need to just call for implementation.

It's interesting that yesterday -- I know you were so busy here the last two days, you probably didn't see yesterday the Inter-American Commission. That's the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Commission, the -- the Commission on -- the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, I'm sorry, released a report yesterday, and the report is on the human rights of Indigenous women, and there's something in that passage of one of the areas of report that I wanted to zero in on because it's so appropriate to hear, I think. They talk about the exposure to violence and discrimination of Indigenous women in the Americas -- that includes Canada, of course -- but the observation they made is that women now reject being categorized as victims and have now demanded recognition as holders of rights and empowered actors. So that's a whole different approach to it, and I think it's not only positive but very powerful, that women are now demanding recognition as rights-holders. That's why I share these rights with you that are there, and also, importantly, to be recognized as empowered actors, and that's what I see you doing, the commissioners and also all of the witnesses that have been appearing in front of you.

So during these hearings, we could or we
should consider not only the Canadian but the international human rights law that protects women and families; also to consider the role men play in preventing violence and the systems we can institute to help with this important work.

And just by a concluding story, as well, from our journey with the Truth Commission, the observation we make is despite all of this myriad of international law, Canadian law, human rights law, despite the progress that we've made in some areas, we still have a very -- a very long way to go, and I want to encourage us to keep working hard.

An elder told us we -- actually, we need to work harder than we can, to work harder than we can, so that the rights of Indigenous women and children to live free from violence is now a reality, so I'd like to thank each and every one of you for the work you're doing to help secure these rights for women.

And lastly, as a commissioner, I heard what were called the seven most powerful words, the seven most powerful words: I'm sorry, forgive me, and I love you. Those are the seven most powerful words we heard during the commission, and I underscore again the last three words because we heard so many times that we couldn't do this before, and guess what, someone said: It's okay. It's okay now to say I love you.
So with that, I thank you, and I encourage and applaud you for your continued journey. I know it's a difficult -- a difficult journey, but it's an important journey because, as my sister said, it's about healing. It's about healing, and I'm witnessing that happening across the country in a good way, and you're adding that -- to that very essential need for our people.

So (speaking in Native language), to thank you very, very much for your dedication, your courage to undertake this -- this heavy load, and just to the commissioners individually, from a commissioner to commissioner, not only to thank you but please, take care of yourself as well. Hay-hay. Thank you.

--- Upon recessing at 9:31 a.m.

--- Upon resuming at 9:41 p.m.

Hearing # 1

Vanessa Corado and Muriel Whiteman

In relation to Freeda Alvina Whiteman,

Ashley Young and Brandy Wesaquate

Heard by: Commissioner Qajaq Robinson

Commissioner Counsel: Joseph Murdoch-Flowers

Grandmothers, Elders, Knowledge-keepers:

Florence Catcheway, Cynthia Cardinal, Miyna Manniapik

Registrar: Bryan Zandberg

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Good morning.
I think we're ready to start. Joey, I'll leave it to you to let us know how that will be done.

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Thank you, commissioner. So, commissioner, this morning I have the honour of working with Vanessa Corado here and Muriel -- Muriel Whiteman.

Before coming in here, we spoke about the requirement for the oath or affirmation, and before coming in here, we smudged, each of us, and I would ask that for the purposes of the oath or affirmation, that that satisfy those requirements.

**COMMISSIONER QAQAQ ROBINSON:** I want to also note that I've offered tobacco, and following protocols, I accept that.

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Thank you.

Vanessa, when I first got -- when I first looked at the information that we had from you, I read about your mother Freeda.

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** But as we spoke this morning before coming in here, more names came up of missing loved ones, and as Muriel and I spoke, too, more names or at least one more name of a murdered loved one came up, and I think it's important that we include all of those names.
You spoke to me about Lori Whiteman and Brandy Wesaquate and your friend's niece in Ontario and Ashley Young, who is now in hospital, and I just thought it was important to acknowledge those names, as well, and I'll now stop talking and put this down and let you tell what you tell us -- what you want to tell us.

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** With Brandy, she's a relative of my family who's from Regina that went missing in January 2012, and my Aunty Lori (ph) Whiteman, her mother went missing in I think 1976 or could have been earlier, and I just recently heard about a friend of mine. She has her niece in Ontario that just went missing maybe about a few months ago, and they're now on that road to looking for her and, you know, searching for her, and Ashley Young is a family member of mine, and she's in the hospital right now, and we just want justice for her for what she's going through and her family's going through.

It seems like, you know, with this inquiry there's -- it seems all too common to hear so many of our Aboriginal women or girls, you know, having, like -- missing, murdered, you know, and it's not only missing or murdered; it's, like, other things happening to them, you know, violence and other stuff, and it's -- like, for somebody -- like, for me to say, like, it's a small world, and it's amazing how -- not amazing but alarming how
many people I know that -- I thought I was only going
through this, and I hear about other people and -- you
know, why is that? You know, like, it's -- it's getting
more and more common, and it's not a good thing.

When my mom had went missing was in 2006.
The Bissell Centre had reported my mom missing because
she -- my mom would get her cheque from the Bissell Centre.
That's where she got her mail. So my mom was there, and
picking up her mail regularly and Bissell Centre called me,
asked me if I knew where my mom was? No, I didn't know,
and they said, yeah, she hasn't been around to pick up her
cheque, and so I -- I never really thought much of it
because of the way my mom was at the time, she was always
out and about and doing her own thing and, you know, she's
keeping herself busy doing her stuff because -- and my mom
was, like, a -- she was an alcoholic and a drug addict and
always with, you know, those kind of people, and they would
keep, I don't know, taking her to do, you know, stuff like
that, and the last time I spoke to my mom, I had blamed
myself because we had argued that day about her drinking
and that I told her to come back when she was sober, and
you know, I blame myself. Maybe if I told her she could
have stayed, this wouldn't have happened.

You know, for a long time, I blamed myself
for that. You know, it's just, you know, things like that
make it hard to, like -- you know, you put blame on
yourself because you think if I had done things
differently, it wouldn't be like this today. It took a
long time to stop blaming myself for that where I had to go
to counseling, you know, to -- to realize, you know, it's
not my fault. You know, my mom went missing because, you
know, maybe -- you know, there were so many scenarios in my
head, like, maybe somebody stole her or maybe she was in
jail, maybe this, maybe that, you know, like, so many
things, and -- it's just -- you know, I thought when I
didn't see my mom for a while and Bissell Centre said that
they reported her missing, I thought, you know what, maybe
she's in jail because she had been in jail so many times
before that if I didn't hear from her, that's where she
was, so I just assumed this time maybe she was in jail.

So I went to the Remand Center one day, and
I walked in there, and I asked them, I said -- if
Freeda Whiteman was in there, and they said because of the
Freedom of Information and Privacy Act, we're unable to
tell you that. They said that she has to want you to know
she's here. She'll either call or, you know, let you know
some way that she's there, and -- you know, my mom had
suffered being beat the year before to the point where she
almost died, and so she was having memory loss from that,
and she always used to carry a little book, and -- with
everybody's address, names, phone number, and -- because she couldn't remember phone numbers anymore, and -- you know, and so when I was, like, there, I was disappointed, and I thought, you know what, my mom can't even remember phone numbers, so how's she going to call us?

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Can I ask you a question about that? What were your experiences -- you said your mother had been in jail before.

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** M'hm.

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Did you have any experiences in communicating with your mother when she was in jail before that?

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Yes, I did.

**MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS:** Can you talk about that?

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** One time, my mom was in Fort Saskatchewan jail in -- well, after their -- like, this was the year before. My brother had been shot, and I wanted to try and tell my mom, and -- and I was trying to figure out a way to be able to tell her, so I went to the Fort Saskatchewan jail with her GST cheque, and that was -- I was saying I was depositing it for canteen, and that was how I was able to know she was there, and they said, yeah, she was there, and I just gave the GST cheque, and -- and then I told the -- I explained why I was there
and stuff, and they got the chaplain to tell my mom what was going on, and that they allowed her to call, and I was able to tell my mom what was going on and -- but, you know, at the time when my mom went missing, like, when I went to the Remand, I didn't even think of trying something like that because I didn't have no -- no mail, no nothing to -- you know, to even try that, and -- you know, like, when somebody goes missing, you think, you know, there has to be a way around that. You know, there has to be a way -- when someone goes missing, how can you get around that to be able to know if they're in the jail or -- or if they're in the hospital or if they're, you know, somewhere? Like -- especially for somebody like my mom when -- like, she had memory loss from what had happened to her, you know, what if they don't remember who they are? How do you find them then? You know, like, do they have -- like, we were talking yesterday about how, you know, maybe the people that, like, have memory loss or something, they should have something, a list of their names, you know, that goes to the missing persons place or -- you know, like -- because I had went out to Red Deer one time. Like, I was calling around looking for my mom, and my Uncle Lawrence works with the RCMP in Red Deer, and at that time they said they found a woman, a Jane Doe, the -- I think it was a mental institution or something
like that. I don't remember, but it was snowing like crazy
that day, like, such a bad snowstorm that I drove through
there with my brother and my kids' dad at the time, we were
together, and it was snowing like crazy, but I was
determined to find out who this woman was, and when I asked
the lady there what she looked like, could she describe
her, and -- so she told me, well, you know, she's got dark
brown hair, long, it's wavy, and she stands about 5 foot 4,
and -- you know, like, she's just -- I felt like she's
describing my mom. Like, that's how excited I was to drive
through a snowstorm to go see who this lady was. Didn't
remember her name, nothing.

And so we got there, and we went to the
wrong hospital, the first one, and then we went to the
other one, and we found it, and we came there, and they
said there was only one person allowed inside, and I had to
have my brother and José, they were waiting by the door,
and there was, like, at least three doors to go through to
get to where this lady was sitting, and I seen her hair.
You know, it was down, and I was -- my heart was beating
like crazy, and I was like, oh, my God, this is -- you
know, it must be my mom. You know, like -- and when
I -- like, because I seen her arm was on the wheelchair,
arm resting, and -- and I was, like -- couldn't see that
far because it was pretty far down the way, and when I got
to her, she was sitting by a window, and she turned -- they turned her around. It was not my mom, and I was -- you know, like, my heart dropped to the floor, and I was, like -- but then, you know, I was always worried about this woman, too, because, like, who does she belong to? What do they -- what are they going to do with this women? You know, like, they're -- you know. I still wonder, you know, what happened to her, what -- you know? This is somebody's mother or daughter or sister, you know.

And so after that, you know, like, I always was searching for my mom continuously. Like, I made pictures with -- you know, with my phone number on it, my address, if you hear anything from her -- you know, we put them all over downtown, and every time, like, I had a holiday from work, that's what I was doing, and after maybe the first three or four years, I started to realize we weren't really enjoying our holiday because I was always, like, if we have time, we're going to go look here. Somebody would say, you know, like, oh, have you tried -- you know, we went to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, we went to Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, we went to B.C., everywhere in B.C. We had a guy that we met in B.C. to took us around to Surrey, Burnaby, you know, like, all areas, this is where people hang out, and my kids always remember that because they said -- like, we knew Vancouver
and surrounding area so well because we'd been there so
many times because it's such a big place, and -- you know,
like, we -- I was searching and searching and searching for
my mom, and -- I always had my kids with me. You know,
like, they would -- that -- they were my -- you know, my
rock to -- in the search for my mom, and they remember just
as much as I do, and yeah, to...

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: You said you
made posters and put them around town here. How did you go
about that, and did you have any help for that?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: No. We just, like -- I
just made it on that Paint program on the computer. I just
put a picture of my mom, and I put if you know where my mom
is, and I had her name and my phone number on there, let me
know, and then -- sometimes I would get calls, and people
would be, like, oh, I know your mom, you know, I used to
party with her, and I'm like, well, do you know where she
is? No, I just wanted to say I knew your mom. Like -- and
it used to kind of make me mad because you know -- I used
to be, like, you know, this is no joke. Like, it's not
funny, and -- you know, we used to go downtown all the time
to -- we'd look for certain people she was hanging out
with, her friends. We'd go look for them, too, and
question them and say, oh, when you see my mom last, where
did you see her? And at that time, there was the
Eric Hotel (ph) downtown, and that's where -- she was either there, or she was at this -- another bar. It's called Milla's (ph) now I think. I can't remember what it's called. They used to call it the Blue Nose, and that's where I would go look, just places she would frequent and, you know, hang out with her friends and stuff, and -- a lot of the people that my mom knew have now passed on, and -- which is quite -- you know, quite a bit, and I don't see any of the other ones around. One of her best friends, I only know one -- one remaining now, and all the rest are -- have passed on, and -- you know, they were, like, trying to be supportive, too, and they would, you know, do their networking downtown and question other people, hey, you knew her, and oh, I talked to whoever, and this is what they told me, and we used to get a lot of different stories, but we'd always try to, like, ask those people or look for those people.

The Boyle Street Co-Op is another place my mom would be, so -- you know, even today if I go there and I know somebody there, that knew, me or my mom, they would, you know, ask me, oh, have you heard anything? Have you guys had any leads? Have you guys -- like, is there anything? No, still nothing, and they just say, well, I keep you in my prayers, they say, and hopefully one day you find her.
MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Throughout this inquiry process, have you come across any materials that have helped you in your search?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: In the inquiry, no. When -- you know, we all get -- when you go to the meeting, you get a booklet from the inquiry, a binder full of information, and on there it was, like -- there's things, like, for when you're just first missing a person, it has all that information, and I said, what do you -- what kind of booklet do you have for someone who's been missing for 11 years? You know, like, what kind of stuff do you have in there for -- you know, like, to me, I didn't really find it helpful. You know, I needed something for now. Like, it's been 11 years for me, and -- not just new, it's not just -- you know, I -- I know I've done a lot of searching. I've done everything I could, and even, like, we were going to go to Kingston, Ontario, because back then you were like, oh, there's a jail there, too, and did you guys go there, my cousins would say, family would say, friends would say; you know, they're, like -- I had Googled women's jails and stuff. They're like, oh, there's one out in Hobbema. There's, like, a -- when you get out of jail, they send you there, or -- I don't know, so -- then I was, like -- social media wasn't that big then. Google didn't have as much information as it does now. Like, you can
find way more than when I was first searching for my mom, and -- you know, I tried anything and everything. Like, I even went to Alberta Hospital to see if my mom would be there, and -- because of her memory loss and stuff, and they actually -- like, they didn't -- like, they didn't just turn me away. They said, we have to ask -- I don't know if it was, like, a -- was it -- not the manager but supervisor, somebody, they had to ask if they could even tell us, like, if, you know, there was a patient there by that name or not, or -- because, again, with Freedom of Information and Privacy, there has to be, like -- you know, they can't tell you stuff, and -- and because I said, you know, that's my mom, and it's important because -- you know, I've been looking for her for the past few months now, I said, and I really need to know because of her memory loss. I explained her condition, and she is very frail even though she didn't like to admit it, and -- because one -- one time my mom was on the bus, and the bus had stopped, like, quickly, and she hit her head on the pole, and the police brought her home to me. They said they -- she was at the hospital, but they gave her a ride home just to make sure she got home, and she couldn't even remember us for, like, maybe even a week. My kids were, like, Gammy (ph), and she'd, like -- she would just sit there, and she was -- like, you could tell she was either
trying to remember or -- you know, my kids couldn't, like, understand why my mom was like that, and I said, well, you know what happened to her, and she can't remember a lot of stuff, so just -- we'll just leave her, and finally after a few days, she -- she was okay, and she started to remember stuff and how she got home, and that's when I started to notice, you know, like, she was very sensitive to -- like, her head would be sensitive to any type of, like, bumps or anything, so -- and that's what made me think when I had looked for the -- went to see the lady in Red Deer, that's why I thought, you know, possibility to be my mom because memory loss and...

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Do you want to talk about filing a missing persons report?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: When I went in -- I had went in January 2007 to file a missing persons report. I went to file a missing persons report, and it -- when they give you the paper, it tells you the name, age, height, weight, and everything. You have to, like, give a description, and so I stood there for at least an hour writing out everything I could think of: Scars my mom had, you know, like, things she had been through, had she been in jail, yeah, she -- you guys should no her really well by now, you know? They brought my mom home so many times, and when I went to do the missing persons report, I brought it
to the desk, and the lady was reading through it, and she
told me that -- maybe give it a few days, and I was, like,
why, and -- like -- like, my thing was, like, isn't it,
like, 72 hours you can report a person missing, and -- you
know, like -- she was, like -- she didn't really say
anything about, like, the time and -- she said, well, you
know, your mom lived a high-risk lifestyle, so, you know,
maybe that's why you guys haven't seen her, so that was
kind of, like, a -- like, a kick in the face is how I
explained it because, you know, no matter what my mom did,
she's still a missing person. It -- you can't blame her
for -- you know, like, because we watch so much, like,
movies and things, and you see people just being stolen off
the street, you know, like, that's in your mind, right?
You just think, oh, well, what if somebody just grabbed her
and stole her? You know, you don't think, like, oh,
because -- you know, it's her fault for living that kind of
life that she -- you didn't -- you don't see her now.
Like, that's just not fair to me, but...

And it was, like -- I was really angry that
day when they told me it was her fault for living a
high-risk lifestyle, and yesterday I went back -- like, I
started counseling again because of this, and I was talking
with my counsellor about high risk. We were both upset
about that term. Like, a nurse who works night shift could
be a high-risk lifestyle. Somebody who -- you know, a gas
station employee who works night shift lives a high-risk
lifestyle because, you know, that -- it's, like -- it puts
them at risk for things to happen, and for them to say my
mom lived a high-risk lifestyle, which meaning she hangs
around down -- downtown, she drinks, whatever, that was
kind of what they were saying to me, and, you know,
like -- and yesterday when I discussed that, it was just,
like -- anybody can live a high-risk lifestyle:
Firefighter, anybody, you know, doctors, nurses, you know,
anyone, anyone and everyone, so why is it just they're
using that just for them? Like, I notice that a lot.
Like, when I read the articles in the news, oh, well, you
know, they had a high-risk lifestyle, or they were, like,
criminals before.

One of the articles I had, like -- like, I
save them in my Facebook, and I read -- I always come
across this one part in an article that says, well, they
had been involved with the police criminally. Like, the
young boy who was in Calgary, they didn't go check up on
him because of -- you know, he had been involved with the
police before and whatever, so -- so what? Because -- to
you guys he was a bad person, so you didn't go check up on
him? And, you know, I keep seeing that in a lot of the
articles, like, because of the person they were, that's why
they didn't -- the police didn't do a follow-up, and that's just not right.

You know, I -- I've been reading through the code of ethics and code of conduct for health workers, social workers, police, you know, like -- and it says people have to be, you know, treated with dignity, and these people -- like, the police part that I read that sticks in my mind is that regardless of their ethnicity and stuff that they have to be treated with dignity, and the police's job is to help the community. That's what they're there for, to be -- make people feel safe and to do their jobs as -- you know, workers in the -- with the community because, you know, they work with anyone and everyone, and -- you know, I read, like, these code of ethics and stuff because -- I actually, like, went to court with a case worker a few years ago, and she thought because she wasn't registered with the ASCW (ph) that she didn't have to follow the code of ethics, and -- yeah.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: What does it stand for?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Alberta social workers -- AS -- I can't remember what it's -- but Alberta social workers, and they have a code of ethics for their workers, and then there's a code of ethics for public workers or people who work with the public or just Alberta
employees, and, you know, I always -- like, when I went to
court, I use that in court because she was trying to treat
me as if I was, like, some dumb little Native woman, and
you know, like, I told her, I said, you messed with the
wrong person, you know, and the judge was like, wow, good
for you, somebody did their homework, and you know, that's
a lot of the reason why, like, I read up on stuff like that
because, you know, when I was looking for my mom, I was,
like, trying to find -- I always say a loop for that
Freedom of Information and Privacy Act. You know, I -- I
was reading that, and I was like, there's got to be a way
around it, and -- you know, like, my mom's missing. There
has to be something more that can be done, and I try to
educate myself on stuff like that because, you know,
sometimes you don't think it's needed, and it comes in
handy when -- especially for stuff like this, and...

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Did you follow
up on the missing persons report after you initially filed
it?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm. I had went -- I
had went, I think, in 2009 and 2010, and they just -- I was
told there was nothing. They haven't found anything. They
questioned people around downtown, and they haven't come
across anything, so I didn't know how -- like, I've never
had, like, to search for someone missing before, so I
didn't know how that went, and then I went again in 2012, and they told me that I hadn't even filed a missing persons report on my mom. They told me that I never filed anything for my mom missing, so I didn't even know what to -- like, I was already going through so much in that time because I had lost my son a few months before, so I wasn't as strong mentally or emotionally, and I just accepted that that day. I was, like, I couldn't believe it. I just walked out of the police station, and I felt like -- like, let down, kind of, because, you know, you guys know my mom, I said. You guys should know a lot about my mom. Like, you guys should have a record and stuff, and -- and I know I did it because after I lost my -- my son, I had lost my home and everything because I had a breakdown, and I lost all my papers and stuff, and my kids' dad had tried to take a lot of the stuff, and I asked him, I said, you know, can you look in your stuff -- the stuff that you took because he had stored it at his sister's, and I kept that missing persons report, the copy. It was in an envelope, and it had my mom's name on it, and -- and I just kept thinking, you know what, I know -- I know I did the -- the missing persons report, and I was like, why would they say no? You know, like, it just makes no sense, like, how they can come say that after only, like, two years of doing that and -- I was so mad because, you know, like, I have a criminal
record, and the police were more concerned about me than they were of talking about my mom, and that really made me angry because it was about my mom. It wasn't about me that I went there for, and they were just saying, like, I hope you're, you know, keeping good behavior or whatever, and I just -- you know, when you don't have someone with you, you don't have the support, you just think -- you know, the police, they think they can do whatever they want and not listen to you, and that makes me trust them so much less.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Do you have any comments on how you see police work, differences in police work regarding missing Indigenous people versus others?

MS. MURIEL WHITEMAN: I think they're more inclined to look for a white person than for a Native person because right away they put them on TV whereas with Native people they don't do that unless we push it or -- you know, and they don't do their jobs in regards to us.

I just want to read what I wrote this morning. My sister Freeda was just one year older than me, and my sister Kathleen was two years younger, so as children we were best friends. As we came of age, we were each sent to St. Joseph Residential School along with the rest of my family, so we took up for each other and tried to look after each other. They say trauma brings you
closer together, and being away from your parents at a very young age is very traumatic. I remember running away numerous times, and we all went there until we were teens. After that, we lived with my mother, Irene, who was a widow. My dad had died when I was around 6 or 7. I don't recall the exact year. My parents had both went to residential school also. My mom worked three jobs to make ends meet, and seeing her work so hard gave us our work ethic. When she walked on in 1976 from cancer, we were lost, so I, Freeda, and Kat decided to move to our reserve. We lasted around a year. We moved to Regina, and we all started families. We then all moved to Saskatoon, and my sister Kat moved to Edmonton where she was stabbed to death by her common law in 1985. We had family here, so I and then Freeda moved here to Edmonton. We didn't always hang out together, but we were still those little girls in residential school trying to look after each other.

I remember the last time I saw -- we saw each other. It was the year we both went to Vanessa's and sleep over. We slept on a sectional, one on each side, whispering, laughing, and giggling early in the morning. When Freeda went missing, I was lost again, because I thought my sisters and I would grow old together, and here I am growing old by myself.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: You know, my mom -- my
kids really miss my mom. They're all adults now, and not having her in our life is like -- it's not good. Like, when I became a grandmother myself for the first time, and I have no one to really share it with, and I was so proud thinking, you know, my mom would have been so happy, you know, to be a great grandma because she always used to take my kids everywhere. Like, my mom would, like, go to Bissell Centre Christmas party, she would take my kids, you know, they would come back with stuff. My kids always talk about that every Christmas. They would talk about, like, Easter parties, Halloween parties; oh, you know, Gammy took us here yesterday, you know? We went and we got candies and -- you know, like, always -- and they would always, like that, start reminiscing on those -- at those times.

You know, I was talking about my mom and how she would -- you know, if she knew of an event in town that was free, and, you know, it -- and kids would get stuff like balloons, candies, or, you know, stickers and stuff, you know, my kids would be, like, so happy for things like that. My mom would always take them, even when they would get a little bit older and they thought they were too big for stuff like that, my mom would still encourage them to, like, live life and have fun, and let's go do this, and -- you know, like -- my two older daughters always used to, like, refuse, and she'd -- come on, don't be like that,
and let's just go, and they would go, and they would have fun, and they would come back, and they'd be all happy because, you know, they went, you know? If Gammy didn't tell me to go, I wouldn't have gone, you know?

One of my daughters had one, like, a little -- like, a gift basket or whatever, and she was like, so proud because it had, like -- it was Easter, and it was, like, had lots of chocolate and stuff, and, oh, if -- see, if you didn't go, you wouldn't have won that, she said, and that was, like, you know, their memories of, you know, being with my mom and -- you know, my mom always -- always thought of my children and everyone else's children. Like, if she was, like, somewhere where, like, they were giving away free clothes, she would, like, pick clothes for everybody's kids, not just mine. She'd be like, oh, this is for so-and-so's kid, and she was like, give it to them, and -- you know, I -- you know, even a friend of mine was, like, I can't believe your mom thought of even my kids, you know? Like, your mom is so thoughtful, and -- you know, she was. She was always, like, thinking of everyone, and that's how I -- that's how I am now. Like, I grew up to be that way.

And, you know, like, with my mom being in residential school, she never had a lot of, like, parenting skills, but she did the best that she could and the best
that she knew. She'd always say, this is what my mom
taught me, this is what my mom said, or she would -- like,
my Aunty Bernice is the oldest, and she would, like -- she
would say, oh, I learned stuff from Bernice, too,
and -- you know, like -- my mom always used to tell me,
like, oh, if -- when you're older, you have to keep
our -- like, our culture -- try to learn everything you
can. When somebody's doing a ceremony, pay attention. She
always used to tell me that when I was little, and she
said, I never learned a whole lot about -- never learned a
whole lot about it, but she said I used to pay attention
when people would do ceremonies or have any, like, feasts
or gatherings, and those are words today that I use in my
own children, and they -- you know, for my daughters to
learn a lot from how our -- like, how our people are.
Like, we were losing the culture, and I'm -- I try to keep
it alive with my children, and I try to practice, you know,
as much of it as I can, you know, because I never grew up
on the reserve, and that was something my mom was always,
like -- she'd always have sweet grass, she'd always
have -- you know, she had this red piece of cloth that she
hung up on my wall, and it had the eagle feather and a
braid of sweet grass in a circle, and it was tied, and she
used to say that was protection for our home, and you
cannot bring any negativity, drugs, alcohol into the home,
she would say, and -- and I would always keep that in mind, and -- you know, to -- to learn stuff from my mom because I thought my mom would grow old with me, too, and -- you know, she'd be this little old lady, and we used to joke about how she was going to have little kookum dresses and stuff, and my kids were, like, oh, yeah, we'll just be driving her around and everything instead of her just taking the bus to go downtown to her little events and stuff, and we'd be driving her there, and -- you know, we would joke about stuff, about how we would be waiting for her, and she'll just be taking her time, and, you know, like -- we always believed that, like, that's how our life would be and how would she be now, you know?

Like, my mom was my -- no matter what -- what I went through or what she went through in our lives, we were always there for each other, and my kids always -- you know, like, something will remind them of my mom. Like, my mom liked Obsession perfume, so if we were walking through the Bay or something and you'd get a whiff of that smell, that's the first thing that -- oh, well, smells like, you know, Gammy here, and -- you know, like, things like -- like, if we're somewhere, I notice they always, like, would have a memory of my mom, and it was really, like, hard -- it was really hard in the first few years to always hear my kids say, oh, what if, you know,
Gammy was here, we'd -- we'd be there right now, or we'd have this and -- you know, like -- instead, we were always on the go, looking for her. It wasn't the same anymore, and they really missed that.

Like, they missed, like, the soup my mom would make, and when my mom would make bannock, they would miss stuff, like -- like, my mom used to do this -- it's kind of like a secret Santa but just with, like, my kids. Like, she's like, oh, you guys have to love each other as a family, and so you're going to, like, pick something for her, and you're going to pick something for your brother, and -- you know, she would do stuff like that with them because she said you guys have to learn to respect each other as a family and that you guys have to look out for one -- each other as a family, and she always, like, would do that all the time.

We'd have, like -- if we had a meal, like, Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter dinner, we have what we call spirit dishes, and they -- she would make my kids do the spirit dish because she said you have to learn how to do this, too, and, you know, say a prayer, and you're feeding our -- you know, our relations in the spirit world, and, you know, my kids still do that. Even on their own, they're living on their own, and they still do that when they have their -- their dinners and stuff, and that's
something they -- you know, that they learned from my mom, and -- you know, I'm thankful for a lot of the stuff that they do on their own that -- you know, like, I never taught them, but my mom did and -- you know, that's -- that's the stuff we miss. You know, her and her -- her teachings and trying to always encourage our culture to keep going within the family.

My oldest daughter always remembers, my mom made her a traditional outfit that she was -- she was dancing pow-wow. My mom took her to the pow-wow in Poundmaker's, and she won $5 for Tiny Tots, and she said that's one of the strongest memories she has, and -- and I told her, I said, you know, those kind of memories bring smiles to your face and good thoughts and make you feel good inside, and that's how we should remember her always, for things like that.

It's a -- it's -- you know, it's hard not having my mom around because, you know, like, going through things in my life where I needed my mother, it wasn't easy, and my brother had passed on, and we -- you know, in my mind, it's, like, the parent -- that's the parent's job to bury their child. I never thought it was my job because, you know, I'm the sister, but -- you know it was the biggest thing I ever learned in my life. I've never had a funeral or had been to one since my Aunt Kathy passed away,
so I didn't really know every single thing that you have to do, so when it was time to bury my brother, I was, like -- I wished that my mom was there, and she would know what to do, I thought, but you know, I was there, and I managed to get everything that needed to be done for a traditional Dakota burial, and that was one of the biggest things I've ever learned in my life, and that was -- you know, we need our parents there for that, and -- well, I thought, and -- you know, I did it.

And another time, I really, really -- I needed my mom when my son passed away. I remember being at the hospital, and when they told me he'd passed away, I yelled out for my mom, and I don't know why I had that reaction when I knew she wasn't there, but that's who I needed at the time, and even the nurse came in, and she's like, oh, do you want anybody we can call for you? And I didn't even know what to say because she's, like, is your -- maybe call your mom, maybe the grandparents? I was like, I don't have any, and she was, like, oh, I'm sorry I asked that question, and -- you know, with things like that, that's when I need my mom the most, and I didn't have her, and I always wish, you know, for that, to have my mom. You know, and to have my mom missing, and I feel like people don't understand. Like, there are so many things you go through in life that you want your -- your mom there
because that's your mom. That's who -- you know, if you needed a big hug, that's who you would run to. If you felt sad, that's who you go to, your mom when you have your mom, and I never really had my dad in my life, and it was such a hard time because -- a hard time in my life when my son passed away, and the day I buried my son, my dad passed away, and it made it even harder, and you know, my dad was dying, and he was alone because everybody was at the funeral for my son, and then -- you know, my dad was here in the hospital, and I just laid down to -- to rest, and they called me and said, oh, your dad passed away. You know, for -- and again, I felt, like, I wish I had my mom, you know, for stuff like that, and -- like, how would it be if my mom was there? You know, I maybe would feel a little bit more strength and maybe not, but at least I would have had my mom there, and I always wish -- you know, like, when people have their -- they always say, oh, when you have -- always tell someone you love them because you never know if you'll see them tomorrow or -- and, you know, I always think about stuff like that every day.

After my mom went missing, I used to tell my kids when they would go to school: See you, love you, have a good day. Every single day they would get out of the car, and they would go to school, that was what I would tell my kids, and they started saying it because I said it
so much that when they got out of the car, they're like, yeah, yeah, we -- you're going to say see you, love you, have a good day. And I'm like, yeah, because, you know, like, ever since Gammy went missing, you know, like, maybe I should have told her I loved her more often, maybe I should have, you know, said something, you know, like that, and -- but because my mom was in residential school, there were a lot of things she never learned, and -- to hug and to tell you "I love you" was hard for her. She tried to say it often as she could, but she -- it wasn't said as much as I would have liked to have heard, but that's why I tell my kids and everybody around me. I always tell them -- you know, if I visit and I'm leaving, I'll say, okay, love you guys, and, you know, see you later, and -- you know, that's something I've been doing since my mom went missing, and, you know, like, my kids now say it. Other people -- like, friends say they say that now, and -- because they always say, you never know, and -- and that's how I've seen it since my mom's been missing is you never expect to be that person who's searching for a missing loved one, and you never think you're going to be going through something like this in life.

And when -- when I'm on social media, if I see a missing person, like, was missing within a few -- few days, I share the post. I share almost every single post.
Like, it's just -- and I say a prayer for that person, and I recently had my friend's son Keenan (ph), he was missing for almost eight days. He had come from B.C. on the bus, and his mom said that he went to his sister's and he left and he was going back to B.C., and that was the last they heard of him, and it just so happened I went to the first meeting with the inquiry, and I had asked people there if they could help, and they said, yeah, for sure, we're going to help you right away, and give us her -- the mom's number and everything, and to this day we don't know how he got back to B.C. because he did not take the bus. He didn't take a plane. He -- we don't know how he got back there. He was really -- his sister found him outside sleeping in the bushes by her apartment, and he was all dirty and everything and still had the clothes on he had left in, and -- but he was -- you know, when he was found, I put on social media, you know, we found him, and -- and it counts how many shares you have on there, so I had more than a hundred thousand shares within those few days, three days, I believe it was, and -- you know, like, I always think about some of the ideas, when someone goes missing, you know, and I -- I always think about, like, if -- with social media today, it's very easy to put, you know, a posting out there for someone who's missing, and I had a friend who found -- she has -- she had a 10-year-old son
went skateboarding one Saturday by himself and met up with
some other kids, and if it wasn't for social media, they
wouldn't have found him. Like, some kid that didn't even
know him, his mom was looking on buy and sell, and she seen
a picture of her -- the boy, and she was like, oh,
that -- this kid was with mine earlier today, and I didn't
know he was missing, she said, but he -- you know, he's 10
years old, and -- stuff like that I wish we had in 2006
when my mom went missing. You know, maybe someone or
anyone would have heard something, or -- I didn't know too
much about computers then, and the Paint program was so
easy to just, like, put my mom's picture on there, type in
all the stuff, and print it out, and that was all I had to
use, and -- you know, like, driving around and searching
for my mom, and now that we have so many other things, but
my thing is, like -- for my belief is, like, if you ask the
police for -- to search for missing people, you think they
have this big network; like, oh, we can check here, check
there. That's how I see the police, but when you go to
them and they don't even try to do anything, it felt
like -- it's, like, what do you do, you know? You feel
helpless when you don't have -- like, you don't have that
authority to go here, go there to look because of, again,
the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act is -- there has
to be something for -- for us to be able to look for our
loved ones, you know? Has to be something that can be done because you do feel helpless. You really do. You don't know where to start. You don't know what to do except for, you know, like, from what you see -- like, if you watch a movie and you see, like, oh, this person's missing, all of a sudden they have dogs, you know, sniffing the ground looking for this person, they have all, like, AP whatever. Like, you just have that in your mind. You think that's what's going to happen when somebody, you know, goes missing, but none of that happened. Nothing really happens because they're too busy waiting, and I always think, what are they waiting for? How is somebody who's been stolen, murdered, or anything like that just going to come in -- you know, come back?

Like -- like, you're -- when you're hurt and going through this kind of pain, your brain tries to understand. It's trying to figure out, you know, what can you do? What do you do? You know, I always ask myself if -- if somebody stole me, what would I do? You know, if -- you know? Just so many things.

You know, every -- I always, like, think of stuff, and I forget to write it down because I think it's a good idea at the moment. Like, they should just automatically have GPS things on phones, like, for everyone. Doesn't matter if you turn it on or off. It
should just be automatic, like, you know? I don't know how to explain it, but -- I don't know, you just -- even with the inquiry, I was talking last night about -- like, if you have -- can you make, like, a booklet with all of everybody's, like, ideas and recommendations and stuff, so if we left anything out, that's how I feel. Like, you know, are we being listened to?

And I was saying this morning, too, about how -- when I first heard about the inquiry, I was thinking, oh, good, you know, they're going to help me find my mom. That was, you know, not realistic, but that was the first thing -- the thought -- first thought that came to mind was, oh, about time, you know? It only took 11 years, I thought to myself. But, you know, it's not -- it's my 11 years. You know, I've been waiting for this, something like this. Other people, it's longer; other people, it's less, you know, but it's -- you still have that, finally, somebody is going to hear my story about my mom. Somebody's going to know, you know, she was a sister, she was a mother, she was a grandmother, she was a daughter, she was someone to us. She belonged to us.

And I always think, you know, like, the police have to understand that what if it was your family member? How would you would go about it? Maybe because you're the police, you have more -- more connection or more
say to something, but as my aunty was saying, it -- it is true. If you are, like, Aboriginal, they just stereotype everybody and they think, oh, you know what, they're criminals, they're, you know, drunks, they're drug addicts, they're, you know, not good people. They just assume they're all the same, and we're not. You know, there are some that are -- you know, they're sober, they're non -- they're -- they don't use drugs, they don't use alcohol, they're -- you know, they work -- you know, they're trying to, you know, be on the right path in life, and -- but people choose to see -- like, society chooses to see most of the time the negative of people. I notice that in a lot of, like, comments and -- that I read: Oh, this -- if she didn't go do that, she wouldn't be missing. You know, like, what do you know?

Like -- you know, you read the comments, and people say, oh, you play the race card; oh, you do this; you guys think because of this inquiry you are -- you're going to get treated better or more special, and -- reading those kind of comments, like, that just angers me because it's not right. It's -- we're missing a loved one. We've had someone that's been missing for a long time. We just want some kind of closure or help in finding them, and reading comments like that is just, like -- I don't want to say, you know what, you be in my shoes or -- I had read a
few years ago there was this woman who was complaining on
this comment about a young woman went missing, and she
said, oh, yeah, well, if she wasn't partying around, this
wouldn't have happened to her, you know? You young
girls -- young Native girls like to go out and be stupid,
and your parents have no control and stuff. That was her
comment on the -- on the article, and I told her, I said,
bite your tongue, be careful what you say because, you
know, this can happen to anyone, and I had kept
her -- like, I -- her name in mind, and a few -- few years
later, I see the same woman commenting on -- on this
article, and she said -- a few years back, she was
complaining about, you know, a girl going missing, and she
was Native, and she said, I'm sorry I ever said that
because my son is now missing, and she said is that called
kharma or something? Like, she was asking for people to
say something, and -- and she was just getting a bunch of
supportive words from, like, Aboriginal people saying, you
know, pray for your child's return, pray for -- you know,
not -- no negative comments, like, oh, good for you, type
of thing, like some people would say. You know, I was
like, you know, there's that big difference with our people
and white people, so to say is, like, you have to be
careful when you're saying something because it can come
back to you. That's, you know, how I grew up, so if you
can't -- we're always told, like, if you can't say nothing
nice, don't say it at all, and when people are commenting,
I always -- it doesn't matter what it's about. If it turns
negative, I throw my little two cents in there, and I say
be careful what you say because it will come back to you,
and that's just my way of thinking is I try to be kind to
others because you don't know what they're going through.

I myself have been trying to practice being,
like, less judgmental of people and try to be more
understanding of their situation and stuff, and I wish
people would show me that as I look for my mom or continue
to look for my mom, and -- after I lost my son, I kind of
lost that fight in me to keep doing what I was doing, and
that was still looking for my mom, and now I feel like I
have that strength back, and to have this inquiry going on,
that's my -- you know, a -- like, my -- I always -- they
got my back, so to say. They're there for us, and I
appreciate that because this is a long time waiting
and -- you know, I've been hoping for something like this
for so long, and now the day is finally here, I said to
myself this morning, and I'm glad for that, and I just hope
that it continues on afterwards. Like, I need to know that
even though we have -- like, I have my story to say today,
that what is the follow-up going to be? Like, is there
more to it than just what we're doing here today? Like, is
it going to be, like -- if you have, like, a 5-step process
is how I'm seeing it, like, that's how I would think it
would be. Like, this is the first part, the second part,
the third part, and we're going to keep going and -- you
know, until something comes of it, and I don't want to be
just left hanging in the dark. Like, I need to know that
it's going to keep going, and -- like, I want to -- like,
if -- if my mom's records and stuff and everything is going
to be used, then can we know about that too? Like, can we
keep -- can you still keep us informed about what's going
on, and I know there's so many families and so much work to
be done, but even if it was, like, just one update, you
know, don't be like the police and say, oh, we're going to
be there for you, and then you come and -- like, you come
once and then that's it, and we don't hear from you for
11 years. You know, like, I want more than what -- I
expect more than what the police have done. I expect more
involved -- involvement in all of this inquiry stuff,
and...

Like, I was feeling really rushed through
this situation too. Like, I got a call in July, and then I
have a meeting in September, and then now today we're here.
You know, it's a -- to me, it's a really fast process, and
I hope the Government doesn't see it as that's their good
deed to us in helping us. I want them to see, you know
what, you have to be there. You made that promise, now
keep it from this day until whenever, not just -- I don't
want to see it as, like, a Band-Aid or -- type of thing,
so -- like, a lot of the stuff -- like, for myself today, I
probably would have been more prepared if I knew, you know,
what was expected here because I had no idea, and even
though I have been through, like -- like, we go to marches
and stuff, and we bring the poster, Matthew brings it, and
we talk about my mom. Like, at City Hall, they had a
meeting there, and -- you know, you talk about your loved
one that's been missing, and you share your story with
other people that are sharing their story, and you need to
prepare for some -- for stuff like that. It's not easy to
just be able to, like, just come here and say, oh, my mom's
missing, she's been missing for 11 years. You know,
there's -- I know there's more to it, but I never expected,
like, it would be like this today, so a little bit more
time to prepare would have been better for me, and -- this
morning I couldn't even write anything. Last night I
couldn't write anything. My mind was in a blank. I just
wanted to say what I have to say, and -- and just not feel
angry about being rushed.

And it takes a lot for somebody to be able
to come here and talk about, you know, their missing loved
one and -- or their murdered loved one or whoever they're
talking about at that moment, and when I first came out this morning, I was so nervous feeling that I just wanted to burst out in tears, and at the last meeting, like, I had cried for days before because it's, like, you have all this sadness. For 11 years, I've been holding it here. It feels like -- at the first meeting, my chest was so heavy I felt like I couldn't even breathe, and then when I actually got into that room and sat down and talked with them, I felt like it was all going away, that for that 11 years, searching and feeling that sadness, I can finally let it go and have someone else carry some of it for me because it's not easy holding that in your heart and hoping and praying that you're going to find them.

You know, when I -- if I'm driving and I see a woman that looks like my mom, I'll stop and I'll turn around and I'll go see, you know, maybe it's her, or if I just see someone who looks like my mom, I just -- you know, it brings memories, it brings pain, it brings sadness, and you just wish and wish.

Sometimes I feel like, you know, my mind is in the clouds because I just fantasize about finding my mom and things being okay and life going on, and it's not going to happen, and I don't know. Maybe one day it will. You know, like, I see stuff about -- in the news about women and, like, being held captive; oh, they got out of this
house, and I think, oh, what if my mom's in one of those houses? And then I think about, like, they were trafficking women, and they managed to -- like, somebody caught them, and they were all let go and -- you know, things like that, I just -- you can't help but have those, you know, thoughts in your head because you're hopeful, and it's better to stay hopeful than to be negative and giving up because a lot of the times I felt like, you know what, I give up, and -- and then I think, you know, would my mom want me to give up on her? No, she wouldn't.

You know, like, I've thought about having a memorial, but I can't -- I don't have it in me to do it because I think, you know what, that's just letting her go, to me. That's already putting my mom to rest. That's how I see, and we don't know for sure if my mom is alive out there somewhere or if she's already, you know, not here. I don't know that, and my biggest fear is finding out that she's been murdered and deceased, you know, because I always hear other stories. Like, every time I hear something in the news about, oh, they found the remains of, you know, someone, I just get this ugly -- this ugly feeling in my chest and I feel sick, and I can't eat that day because I'm waiting to find out what they're going to say in the news.

They had found a woman out by Fort
Saskatchewan a few years ago, and she fit the description of my mom, too, but they couldn't tell if she was Aboriginal or Asian decent, they had said, and it took, like, a week, I think, for them to find something out, and all that time, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, and it's things like that that trigger that hurt and that pain again and that worry and that, oh, my God, you know, like, what if that's her? What am I going to do? You know? So I have to pray, and I have to smudge, and -- you know, I just, I -- it's hard not to think that way because, you know, like, you don't know. You have no idea where -- where they are.

You know, I heard about the -- the farm or whatever, the ranch somewhere in B.C. near Salmon Arm where they had found the remains of some women there, and even with that, I was having a hard time to sleep because I needed to know more. I needed to know, like, anything, you know? Like, I've had people tell me, oh, you shouldn't think that way, but it's hard not to. It's hard not to think, you know, like, what if? They say don't think negative, but do you know what? When our women go missing, there's a lot of negativity involved in why they went missing. It wasn't just because, oh, they wanted to go missing. No. It's not a fun thing. It's a bad thing. You know, like, how are you -- how can you not see it as
negative?

And I myself know that, you know, the way my mom was, that it's a possibility. It could have, you know, turned out that way, and maybe not. It's hard to say because my mom was, like -- I've seen my mom in a few situations where she could talk herself out of it without problem, and that's why I think, you know, like, my mom was a smart one, and she could have talked her way out of any situation and still go on and -- go on about her day and -- but then I think about, like, other things. You know, she was always, like, a risky person. She didn't care sometimes, and -- and that would all stem from, like, not knowing things and growing up the way she did. Like, they were sheltered in a residential school, they were fed there, clothed there, you know, taught, educated there, and for them to, like, come out of there and just live life wasn't easy for my mom, and she said -- she all -- she always used to say, every day is a new learning experience. You learn something new every day, and she said -- and then she would tell me a story about how she learned how to, like -- how people were telling them to apply for, like, social assistance or -- oh, I didn't even know how you could do that, and -- she would tell me about how her friend was saying, oh, you guys have to open a bank account and -- things like that, they never teach you in
residential school. They never really teach you anything, she said. They just let you out into the world, and you're -- you're done being in the residential school.

You know, my mom always used to like to travel to -- just to see things differently, like, little reserves and stuff, and that's where I thought -- when she had went missing, I thought maybe she was off to some reserve just to see because one time when I was, like, 15, she went to this Driftpile reserve, and she was over there for a week, but I was so worried about her because I didn't see her, and finally she phoned me. She said, I'm stuck over here, and she said, oh, I'll be back later and maybe in a few days or whatever, and you know, I always kept that in mind when my mom would go somewhere or go out, and -- but one thing my mom always used to say when she'd go somewhere, like, if she had a new boyfriend, she'd be, like, oh, this is his phone number, he lives in this house, and this is where he lives and whatever. She always used to tell me that all the time, and I used to think, why is she telling me this, and then I was like, oh, it's for her safety, but when you're young and you're, like, 14, and -- and that age, you don't really think anything of stuff like that, so -- and, you know, I -- I always talk about that on my Facebook; like, tell your children to always let you know where they are, like -- and I always
tell my own children, and, like, you get free Wi-Fi everywhere nowadays. How can you not communicate? Like, they're -- it's everywhere. Like, even McDonalds is free. Tim Hortons is free. You know, like, go there, you know?

And I always tell them, don't work at nights. Like -- you know, I -- I read through some of the stuff they say for prevention of being missing or anything, you know, tell someone where you're going. It doesn't matter who it is, tell someone, and you know, even if, like, my daughter doesn't want to say, oh, I'm going to go to a party, well, tell your sister if you think I'm going to be mad. Tell your sister. But they're older now, and they think they don't have to tell anyone, and I said I don't care if you're, like, in your 30s, 40s, 50s and you're going to a party, you have to let someone know. I don't care how old you are. If you're going to travel somewhere, tell someone, and that's a little bit of what I learned from my mom, what I picked up without knowing. That's for safety, and I just -- yeah, I think that's all I had to -- it's getting -- did you want to say anything?

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: As you were speaking today, there were some photographs on the screens behind us. Did you want to talk about those photos?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: This one is at my aunty's graduation, and there is more of us in the picture,
but I just wanted to have my mom up there. We were there for my aunty graduating, and it was a good day that day. She was all smiling.

And that's my second-oldest daughter, Deandra (ph), who's now 22, and that was at Christmas time. We had those little -- you know those firecrackers you get, you open, you get a hat inside? Yeah, my mom had hers on, and they didn't have one that fit my daughter, so she put that on her, and she was, like, just happy because she had something on her head.

And that's another Christmas party with my -- with my -- at my Aunty Bernice's farm out in Wetaskiwin, and everybody -- there was other people in there, a lot of other people in -- we always used to go out there for Christmas because they can make as much noise for the kids and for the adults.

And there, just -- she's -- I can't remember what she was saying there, and she was visiting at my house. My mom always used to, like, stay with me and -- or my brother, and majority of the time she was living with me, and -- or she'd be, like, oh, I don't want to be a burden, and so she'd, like, get her own place for a while, and she'd get lonely and come back and say it's not easy to live without her grandbabies, and -- she always had somebody, like, sitting with her and -- you know, my kids
always used to, like, hug my mom's arms when she'd watch TV and, you know, hang onto her all the time, and if I was -- if I couldn't do something for them, like, I was busy, like, doing laundry, they'd, you know, be bugging my mom, oh, can you make us this, can you cook us that? Oh, you didn't make your soup lately, can you make your soup, and -- oh, Gammy makes better bannock than Mom does, and then -- they'd always want my mom to make it and not me and stuff like that. Like, there were certain things she would feed them, and they learned, like, cooking stuff from them.

I remember one of my nieces was saying the other day, she said, I miss your mom so much, she said, because when I first learned how to cook, she said, she learned me how to crack an egg and fry eggs, and she was like, I think I was only, like, 6, and -- and it's, like, good to hear stuff like that because, you know, that's what keeps her memory living on, and that helps us, you know, when we're coping with it and -- and for a while there, because I -- for a while, I wasn't, like, looking at pictures, and I was forgetting her laugh. I was forgetting her voice and her face and I would, like -- I actually put my phone screen saver with my mom's picture, and my youngest daughter is 7, and she never met my mom.

And that's my mom when she was in high school. That's in 1973. You know, I posted this picture
on Facebook, and everybody told me how beautiful she is and how my kids look a lot like her, and one of the hardest things with my 7-year-old was, like -- my granddaughter was saying, oh, my grandma, hanging on my arm and my daughter said, you're so lucky you have a grandma, I don't have one of those, and she started to cry, and that really hurt because, you know, she doesn't understand stuff like that, and she doesn't understand how someone can just -- you know, she's 7, and she said, how can somebody steal your mom? Your mom was big. She's -- she wasn't a small girl. Anyhow, that's what she thinks because that's what "missing" means to kids is somebody stole them, and I asked her, I said, why do you think -- why do you think that? And she said, everybody who's missing is somebody -- because somebody stole them. It's because somebody -- she thinks because somebody didn't like them and they stole them, and I told her that's not -- sometimes that's not how it is, and she said, no, has to be like that. Why would somebody steal your mom?

And she was happy because my aunty told her, you know what, you don't have a grandma, but I'm your grandma, and that really helped her a lot, because she said, yeah, I do have a grandma, and then my Aunty Bernice, too, when we went to visit her, she said, I'm your grandma, too, because your grandma was my sister, and we're all
grandmas. We're all grandmothers together, she said, so you have a lot of grandmas, she said, and for my 7-year-old to hear that, it was a lot, and she was happy, and she always said, I thought only kids can have one grandma, you can't have more than one. I said, no, there -- I have a lot of aunties, I said. I have a lot of uncles and a lot of, you know, family that you -- so no, you have a lot of grandmas, I said, and that one, too, I said, and my mom will always be your grandma no matter what.

And then she said maybe one day -- she had lost two teeth last week, and she said I'm going to keep my teeth to show my grandma they fell out, and I said -- it's weird because she just says random stuff like that, and that's another thing that keeps me hopeful in finding my mom. A part of that is, like, you know, I'm going to find my mom so -- so my daughter can have her grandma.

And this picture is of my -- my uncle and my mom. When I was asked at the -- at the meeting, the first meeting, Karen had asked me about -- if my -- my mom's siblings were involved in looking for her, and I said, just my Aunty Muriel and my Uncle Richard, and I said, you know, they were the two closest ones to my mom, and she had asked about other -- other family, if they were involved, and I said, some of them were, some of them weren't, and I had talked recently with my Aunty Bernice, and she said that
she was sorry that she wasn't there to help because she didn't really know how to go about that. Like, it was shocking for her to even find out my mom was missing, and -- and she lived in B.C., and she's getting older and, you know, unable to be mobile and stuff, and she said if I were younger, then I would have done more, but I'm too old now, and I -- it's not easy for me to even get around, she said, and I said, no, that's okay, and -- you know, like, as long as -- you know, I know I'm looking for her, that's all that matters, you know, and my kids are the same way. Like, they still, like, want to continue looking for my mom, and we always -- you know, we plan little things, like, oh, we're going to go here and look here, and you know, we still have that hope that maybe she's got, like, amnesia or something, you know, that's -- or I don't know. You know, we just -- it's things like that that make us stay looking for her and not to give up and not to stop.

And now with the inquiry, it's like, maybe there's more information that can help us search, and maybe you guys can find more and tell us, and that way we'll know, and it's just -- I don't know. It's such a life -- it's going to be an ongoing process in life, and the only way -- the only thing to do is to continue and keep going until something comes of it and not give up.
With -- something else I have to say is my mom was registered with Project KARE because one of the people told her because she was female, she was around downtown, that it was best for her to register, and when they find, like -- like, if they find remains and stuff, and sometimes they say it's Jane Doe or whatever, or they don't -- can't find the next of kin or something, like, would they be able to tell if something like that -- like, right away instead of, like -- because I notice the police don't really say anything. Like, how are we to find out if -- you know, if they're not doing their DNA-testing, where I've heard some cases that they didn't even test the person, they just buried the person as Jane Doe or John Doe, and -- you know, I think it's because they couldn't find DNA for that person or something. I can't remember reading about it, but my mom is -- my mom did give her DNA, so if anything, they said that she had -- that if she would go missing that they would have her DNA.

A lot of the -- and some other things about Project KARE at that time, when -- my mom used to bring all these little papers home with a license plate number, make of a car, a male, you know, that had done something to a female, and it had a lot to do with street workers, but sometimes it wasn't because my mom was walking home one time, it was middle of the day, she said she went to a
doctor's appointment, and she was walking home, and some
guy, like, was trying to push her into a car and say, oh,
let's go party or whatever, and she was like, what the
hell, and -- and she reported him to that Project KARE
because she didn't know who else to report it to because
she thought, you know, police won't listen to it, so she
reported it to the -- reported it to Project KARE, and they
printed it on that sheet that they give you about these men
that would, like, do stuff to women and -- just be reported
their car, make of car and license plate and what they did.
You know, I always wonder if the police are investigating
these men, especially when -- when I used to read some of
the -- what was said on them was, like -- for one of them I
had read was a woman that was -- she had went out on a
date, and the guy had raped her and left her outside the
city, and I was thinking, you know, like, with that
Project KARE, writing those before, why couldn't they see
if it was reoccurring? Like -- and -- like, why can't they
investigate those people? Like, you know, I always think
stuff -- like, I think far back, and -- to things like
that, and my kids always say, don't be a detective. I
said, yeah, but, you know, I just think about possible ways
we can find her, or if only they had done more
investigating, then -- if they had done more investigating,
then maybe a lot of these women wouldn't have gone missing
or -- I always think stuff like that, but I don't know. Makes sense to me, but maybe not to others.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Can I ask you a couple of questions on that? You talked about the Bissell Centre.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Can you tell me a little bit more about what that centre is?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Bissell Centre is like --

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Bissell.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Hm? Yeah, a drop-in centre where they have a lot of resources for homeless people or people that are having -- going through hard times.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: And she was picking up stuff from them regularly?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: She was getting her -- her mail and her cheque there because she had lived down the block, like, maybe a half a block down from them, and it was just more convenient for her because her mail was getting stolen all the time from her place, so that's why she started getting her mail there.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Who runs that centre? Is it through the City, or...
MS. VANESSA CORADO: I have no idea.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M'hm. But they knew -- they were the first ones to get in touch with you when she wasn't picking up her mail anymore?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Do you know if they went and told the police?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: They had filed a missing persons report --

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: They did as well.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: -- because they say that's mandatory for them to do if their clients aren't coming to get mail and stuff, and...

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: And what police force was it? I just -- is it just Edmonton Police Services here in Edmonton --

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: -- or is there RCMP as well?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: No. Just the EPS.

Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Just Edmonton?

Okay. So in addition to your report that you filed, the Bissell Centre filed a report as well?
MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: But then in 2012, they said that there was no report filed?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Have you heard from them at all since?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: No.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: No.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: And even after I had filed the first one, I remember them coming to my home a few months after or a month after. They came to my door, and they were -- they said they were doing a follow-up, and --

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: In 2007 --

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: -- when you first filed it?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: And they asked if I knew of any boyfriend that she was dating at the time, and -- like, they were writing it down and stuff, and they left, and that was pretty much all because...

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Now, you spoke to a lot of her friends.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Did the police
speak to her friends? Did they ever say to you that the
courts

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Only two of the people
said that they -- her friend Delores said that the police
came to her house, and they were looking for her, they
said.

**COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** M'hm.

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** And she said, well,
she's not here, and she said that's all I told them because
I didn't know where your mom was, and then her -- well, I
don't know if it was her boyfriend at the time because I
remember they had just broken up. His name was René (ph),
and him, too, he said the police had questioned him when he
went to jail. They'd asked him if he knew of my mom,
and...

**COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** M'hm. And is
Project KARE connected with the police? Like when,
they -- when she's reported missing, do you think they --

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** I have no idea.

**COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** No idea, eh?

**MS. VANESSA CORADO:** Because the lady that
was running it before, she had passed away three years ago,
the one that encouraged my mom to -- because I -- I
remember when my mom came and she said that she was
registered with Project KARE, and they said because too
many -- I think at that time, there were other women going missing, and -- what was Agnes' middle -- last name?

Agnes?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Bernard.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Oh, Edna Bernard had went missing, and I remember my mom, and -- was that then? I don't know.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Yeah, she was, like, friend of ours, and -- I mean, Edna Bernard, she was found in a car that had been burned, and she was killed, and -- but I remember --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Yeah. Project KARE, they were, like, always -- they were concerned about the women and stuff, so -- my mom used to go -- I can't remember why my mom was (indiscernible), and they kept telling her to get her DNA samples given, so she did, and then when I went to Project KARE in, like, 2009, the lady there, I can't remember if her name's Sandy or Sandra, but she told me that it was a good thing for my mom to do that because, you know, look at the situation we are in now, and she said they encourage that for anyone and everyone, and I said, yeah, it makes sense because -- I used to keep a lot of my mom's clothes, her hairbrush, toothbrush, you know.
I tried to keep it because I thought about DNA stuff, and just knowing that that Project KARE had my mom do that and -- because I don't know how much about how DNA is done or -- so...

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Is Project KARE still ongoing still today?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: I have no idea.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Oh, okay.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: I'M pretty sure it is because -- I think last year I Googled it, and it was -- I still seen a web page about it.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Okay. So they should still have her DNA? Don't know if that ever went to the police?

MS. VANESSA CORADO: No.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: No? Okay. I don't have a lot of more questions. I wanted to tell you a little bit about the process of the inquiry because I know that's some of your questions.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: And we've been given a certain amount of time to do this work, and we are going to be asking for more time, but part of what we wanted to do was to first hear from the families because so many of the previous studies and reports and stuff have not
started with hearing your truth and using your truths as
the foundation for how we do our work. We're going to do
some expert panels -- like, some expert hearing from some
experts, and experts aren't just people that, you know,
got to universities and got a whole bunch of ABCs behind
their name. There's experts who have lived experience and,
you know, issues around human trafficking. Like, we need
to know more about what's happening, but we're also doing
institutional hearings. We are going to be hearing from
crime, from Child and Family Services, from Coroner's
Office, these systems that are supposed to be in place to
serve and protect and to help us: What are they doing
about the issue of violence? What are they not doing? So
we'll be hearing from them.

We're also, because we have power under the
Inquiries Act, requesting documents files that, you know,
you can't get other way. We have that power to do that, so
we are requesting documents, and we're doing some audits of
crime files to see if things were done right.

We're looking at patterns, and -- and
hearing, also, about recommendations and ideas from
families is so important, too, because, I mean, you were on
the ground. You were doing -- trying to do what you
believed police should have been doing, and because you
didn't have that authority, you know, you kept on running
into these blockades of privacy.

So we need to hear from you, what are the -- and you've shared with those, and I want to thank you and acknowledge for that that, you know, how can you, when you come up against institutions with their rules about privacy, you know, you're left in the dark, and if another institution that has the power isn't going to do that, where does that leave you?

You know, there's one thing -- I really want to thank you both for what you've shared, and I want to -- I want to acknowledge how hard it is not to have answers and to be in that dark, and we'll do what we can.

Before we're done, I want to talk to that idea that you talked about, you know, high risk, and I think about when my son climbs up on a bookshelf. That's high risk. Do I turn my back? No. The idea that we leave by saying somebody is high risk and that was the reason, that's all of us in society turning our back. When something's high risk, that's when you go to them, and I agree with you. Those words as excuses aren't acceptable. Our reaction to those words is not acceptable.

So I just -- before we finished, I wanted to say that, and I wanted to thank you for sharing. Was there anything else you want to say before we're done, or your aunty?
MS. MURIEL WHITEMAN: I think we should get a finalized report from the gentle lady of each missing person and what they found.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: There will be a final report. We're still developing what that's going to contain and what it's going to look like, but I've heard you loud and clear that you want to know that you were hurt, and you want information, and you want a list of all the recommendations that families have shared, including yours, to be out there, to be accessible, so I've written -- I've written that down, and I will share that with my colleagues.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: And I was going to ask another question about -- if the police had, like, a -- a search unit made specifically for missing people, like, to be able to have something like that. Like, I'll give an example of something I -- like, when I went through -- when I buried my brother. We had to get moccasins for him. We had to have a star quilt with him. We had to have a drum group sing him in and sing him out. We had to have an Elder there, and do you know, like, none of this was available, so we had a meeting with the band, the Chief and Council the next day after I had buried my brother and I said, you know what, these things need to be at hand for us as a community that when we're burying a loved one that we
have all these in place so we're not calling around. We need to have that drum group available for that time, and the Chief should have thought of these things before.

And that's something, like, with this inquiry, like, when someone goes missing, you know, they should have a search party ready at -- you know, ready to go and look for this person or canvas or whatever. You know, like, I think about stuff like that. Like, there was a woman in a little town that went missing, and her dad said, my daughter's missing, and she hasn't come back from the store. Oh, well, how old is your daughter? Oh, she's 41. You know, it doesn't matter how old they are. They're still your children, but the point is, like, he did a search team -- as soon as, you know, she went missing, he went looking for her, and I said, you know what, maybe if we had something like that, maybe something would be -- you know, maybe we could find them faster or -- I don't know, something. Like -- like, they should have something with the police, like, like -- you know, I used to watch movies, and I'd see, you know, little kids went missing, and oh, right now they have their dogs out there searching for their scent and people searching everywhere, and -- like, why can't we have something similar to that?

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Like standard protocol --
MS. VANESSA CORADO: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: -- mechanisms, response teams, yeah.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm. And, like, kind of like Search and Rescue, right?

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M'hm.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: Like, there needs to be something like that for people, and it's not just for -- you know, it's not like we want, oh, our kid went out with some friends, didn't call within 24 hours. They don't need an amber alert right away because, you know, like, that's something -- you know, amber alert is, you know, for a more high -- higher -- like, more urgent situation or whatever, and sometimes it's just we need -- like, if I feel, like, if things were done quicker, sooner, faster, you know, you went looking for them, you know, it -- it's a tiring job, but sometimes you never know, right? Sometimes you could get a break, and, you know, you find that person right away. I don't know, it's just -- people have to see it more positively, too, when you're searching for somebody -- you never know. If you had done it sooner than later, maybe you'd have had a better outcome.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I've heard that from other families, too, that need for
responsiveness, quickness. You know, that answer, we'll just wait a little bit, maybe -- you know, it's in that little bit that so much got lost.

MS. VANESSA CORADO: M'hm.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: So thank you for that recommendation. Thank you, yeah, for coming and sharing. I have some gifts for you. I -- I don't like explaining it on the mic. I'd rather come talk to you, so I'm going to let Joey do this explaining. Is that okay? You're going to talk to the cameras and explain things while I talk to Vanessa.

MR. JOSEPH MURDOCH-FLOWERS: Sure.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: That's my prerogative.

Exhibits (code: P1P05P0301)

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

--- Upon recessing at 11:43 a.m.

Hearing # 2

Witness: Joanne Ahenakew

In Relation to Laura Ann Ahenakew and Bernadette Ahenakew

Heard by: Commissioner Qajaq Robinson

Commissioner Counsel: Christa Big Canoe

Grandmothers, Elders, Knowledge-keepers:
Joanne Ahenakew (Laura & Bernadette Ahenakew)

Florence Catcheway, Emily Mesher, Cynthia Cardinal,
Miyna Manniapik
Registrar: Bryan Zandberg
Commissioner of Oaths for the Province of Alberta:
Jeff Weigl

Note: The witnesses smudge before the hearing; tobacco exchanged with Commissioner Robinson
--- Upon resuming at 12:41 p.m.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Good afternoon.
Commissioner Robinson, I would like to introduce you to our next participant, Joanne Ahenakew. She will be sharing the story of her Aunt Laura and her Aunt Bernadette. At this point, I would actually ask that Joanne be affirmed in on an eagle feather.

JOANNE AHENAKEW, Affirmed

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Commissioner Robinson, Joanne comes to us today well prepared and would like to start with a statement.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Okay.

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: Good afternoon. My name is Joanne Ahenakew. I'm here to represent my family to discuss our tragic losses and our experiences throughout. I'm here to discuss the murders of my two aunts, Laura Ann Ahenakew and Bernadette Ahenakew.

Lauren and Bernadette were precious to us.
Their absence from our lives is like a gaping hole. Their untimely deaths and the violent way that they were taken from us is something we may never recover from. They were always part of our lives up until the day we lost them to violence. Their lives mattered to us, and they always will. When I think about them, I feel robbed.

My Aunt Laura came to visit us in Saskatoon in 1985. She had been living in Calgary at the time. She had just successfully completed another year in Bible school there. She went missing not long after her arrival in Saskatoon. My mother Nancy Masuskapoe promptly filed a missing persons report.

Laura's body was found in a field on the west side of Saskatoon in March of 1986. I remember being told that a cross-country skier had come across her remains. All that remained were her bones and blood-stained clothing. Someone had stabbed her to death and left her body there. We identified her through dental records. She was 27 years ago old.

Excuse me.

I was just a kid at the time, but I remember her bloody, knife-torn clothing being displayed on the news. That image stayed with me since then. It traumatized me. I never understood why this was done. What purpose did it serve? None. This was only the
beginning of the media circus that began and brought more suffering and pain to an already difficult situation.

Excuse me.

The investigation that handled Laura's case -- the investigator, sorry, that handled Laura's case were John Quinn and Dave Scott. My family liked both of them a lot. They always treated us with respect and compassion. They kept us updated on any progress they had made in the case.

Laura's case did go to trial years later. I remember it being the local news flash every day. The trial was a very dark time for us. The media had a heyday with this case, with horrible headlines like "hooker wars," sensationalizing a terrible act of violence. It was hard to avoid, as it was on the radio, television, and newspapers.

Cindy Karen (ph) was charged for the murder that took -- the murder took place in September of 1985. I remember seeing her on the news, taunting the media and actually giving them the finger on one occasion. These images will remain with me forever. It was the first and only time that I saw the person accused of stabbing my aunt to death.

As the trial -- as the trial went on, gory details were the daily headline. There is even one whole
article written about how Laura had allegedly provoked her stabbing by arguing with Karen. That Laura had accepted a ride from the accused on the night in question made yet another headline.

  Excuse me.

  My family went through daily pain listening to the trial, watching the news, reading the paper, and listening to the radio. They'd had enough, so they wrote to the paper, and I'll read you what they wrote. The headline given to their words were "Speculation Insensitive to Family," and here is what they wrote:

  "As family members of Laura Ann Ahenakew, deceased, we want to emphasize how traumatic it was and still is to read the information you printed: Three bodies, hooker wars may be linked. Why is it necessary to mention our late sister's name when, in fact, you are making assumptions and guesses as to the possible connection? You have indeed conjured up memories in our hearts and minds which are grim and grisly. In fact, you have reopened deep
wounds within our hearts. It seems you may have lost sight of the fact that in many cases, victims such as our sister have left family members behind who are still grieving and picking up the pieces. How much longer do we have to put up with this insensitivity? Sensationalized journalism such as this seems to serve no purpose. Signed, Nancy Masuskapoe and Morris Ahenakew.

Powerful words from her siblings on behalf of the family who took up for her.

Cindy Karen was acquitted on a minor detail. We suffered through the trial and the media circus, and for what? My mother Nancy Masuskapoe and my Uncle Morris Ahenakew again wrote a memorial in the same paper five years after her death, and I'll read it to you now:

"Another year has come and gone since you suddenly left us five years ago. We miss you very much. It broke our hearts to lose you in such a tragic way. Our only consolation is that we know
justice will be done sooner or later. We stand upon our Lord's promise in Psalm 37: 1,2 where he says: 'Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be envious against the workers of inequity, for they shall soon be cut down with the grass and wither as the green herb.' We are assured that you have gone on to that beautiful city where the roses never fade. You are gone to a city where the streets of gold are laid, where the tree of life is blooming and roses never fade. You are gone to live with Jesus where the roses never fade. You are a precious rose, dear sister."

Excuse me.

"We look forward to joining you in that beautiful city where there will be no more sorrow and parting. We love and miss you. Your sister and brother, Nancy and Morris."
My Aunt Laura had a baby girl named Melanie Dawn whom she had given up for adoption as a baby. She kept Melanie as long as she could but decided that she'd have a better chance with another family. I think this changed my Aunt Laura. I don't think she ever stopped missing Melanie, who was her only baby. I remember she brought the photo album that she had dedicated to Melanie with her when she came to visit us in Saskatoon. She was so proud of her baby.

Melanie committed suicide six years ago. She is worthy of mention.

Baby girl, we are so sorry we did not find you in time. This, too, weighs heavily upon my family.

My other aunt on the missing and murdered list is Bernadette Ahenakew. On October 24th, 1989, her nude body was found in a ditch by two farmers just outside Sherwood Park. It took sometime from the discovery of her body to identifying it to be her. My mother had given Bernadette the earrings she was wearing at the time of her death, and one remained on her ear. When Bernadette's body was found, this is one of the details that helped my mother positively identify her.

Like my Aunt Laura, Bernadette has been described as a known prostitute in the media. Again, the media was applying labels to glamorize yet another violent
crime. This is a human being who was valued, loved, and
dearly missed.

I was praying I wouldn't cry.

We received notification through phone calls
and a formal letter from the RCMP who sent us a copy of the
article from the Edmonton Journal describing Bernadette's
body being found. We were informed that they were
investigating the crime and a cause of death was not
determined, but her body was described as beaten and frozen
in the paper. We were told she might have died from
strangulation, but this was never confirmed.

We received regular reports from the
investigating officer in the beginning on Bernadette's
case. However, this officer was transferred to another
unit, and another person took over, and that ended our
regular communication with him.

We have given up on having our day in court
for my Aunt Bernadette. This may never happen for us.
With the horrible experience we had with the media during
Laura's trial that ended up in an acquittal, maybe this was
a blessing.

I'm not sure our hearts are up for that kind
of pain again. Either way a person looks at this, it is
difficult to deal with. The lack of closure makes getting
over and past this very hard indeed. However, there are
families out there who are still wondering where and what happened to their loved ones. At least we could bury Bernadette.

One of the hardest things was never getting to see Laura and Bernadette again. Laura had to be cremated, and Bernadette had to have a closed-casket funeral.

I remember paying attention to the Svekla trial, and my aunt was listed as one of his possible victims, but he, too, was somehow acquitted. This quashed any hope we had of closure. It is a wound in our hearts that remains open, but hope springs eternal.

Bernadette is survived by three sons. Like Laura, her sons were also raised by others. Her first two sons were raised by Bernadette's former foster parents, and her youngest baby was raised by the birth father's mother, so he's being raised by his grandmother. He's in -- they're all in good places. All of these boys are adults now and have children and families of their own. They are pieces of the late Bernadette, and we love them all very much.

Our interactions with the RCMP with regards to these cases have always been respectful. The detectives that handle Laura's case did their best, and for that, we are eternally grateful. We pray for their safety, as they
are brave people to hunt down these monsters.

Like I said before, the first investigator to handle Bernadette's case kept in frequent contact with us. However, he was transferred, so the case was given to another detective who was not so diligent in keeping contact with us.

The RCMP now contact me on a regular basis as to this case. They call to check in and are always offering me and my family support. I know they are only human, and this is an old case. Nevertheless, I will never stop praying and waiting for justice, whether it's seen or unseen by us family members. I don't think these monsters get away with this because justice takes many forms.

Myself, my mother, Nancy Masuskapoe, and my Uncle Morris Ahenakew have rallied for justice, respect, and honour for Laura and Bernadette from Day 1. We have marched, spoke with media, television, news, and we will continue to be a presence. I came today to make darn sure the media does not have another heyday with my aunties or any other family. If someone in the media chooses to slander or sensationalize these violent crimes, I will be there to publicly call you out. I have spent my time on this matter and dealing with media negativity, and it's not going to break my stride.

I have cried, prayed, marched on
Parliament Hill to see this inquiry come to fruition, and

hallelujah, here we are.

No organization, group, or any political
group owns this issue. I have witnessed much
territorality between groups over these missing and
murdered Indigenous people, and I find that ridiculous.
The people that own this are their surviving family members
who have fought from Day 1 to protect the memory of their
lost loved ones. The surviving family members are the ones
you should take your direction from. They can direct you
toward a better process, more positive interaction with law
enforcement, the court systems, et cetera. We have lived
through this, so we know firsthand what it really feels
like.

My recommendations are as follows. Do you
want me just to proceed? There needs to be zero tolerance
for racism to be put in place and actively monitored in the
RCMP training and policy and procedure. My family was
fortunate enough to have positive interactions most of the
time, but this is not the case for everyone. This issue of
mistrust is a serious matter, and it needs to be dealt with
on a daily basis until the negativity is eradicated. I
plan to make use of the support groups offered to me and my
family by the Project KARE unit here in Edmonton. They are
the only ones who have been consistent in offering help, so
they are the ones I trust. I live in a small community an hour and a half away here from Edmonton, and I hate to use the term "redneck," be they are the last people I'll go to. I'll come to Edmonton for my help.

Number 2: Every life matters, and everyone deserves a chance. We need to increase support to the front-line organizations and their workers who deal with people who are living high-risk lifestyles. I support those groups that offer help freely with no strings attached. God bless you all. The front-line organizations I speak of are the halfway houses for women and men, soup kitchens, groups that give clothing, access to health care, et cetera. It goes on and on.

Number 3: Not everyone wants the street life, and some are there and remain there because they have no one and nowhere else to go. These people deserve a chance and an opportunity to change their surroundings. Access to housing, food and water, health care, safety, education, and family supports for them and their children are something that you should work on.

Examination of our foster care system is another recommendation I have. Both of my aunts were in foster care. In fact, all 13 kids in the family were scattered and separated in the '60s scoop. Many of my family members, including my aunts, suffered extreme
sexual, physical, mental abuse and neglect. This has a ripple effect upon one's life. The ripples are far-reaching and affect future generations.

Number 5: Reduction of poverty. Poverty seems to be at the base of all high-risk lifestyles. Reduction of poverty would have a positive impact for everyone. The term "welfare trap" is real. This is what keeps people living at or below the poverty level.

I came to speak to you today not for any other reason than love for my aunts. I'm not here to put them out on display or to make a name for myself. The media has already done that, and they had no respect for Laura or Bernadette.

I am here for justice, and I am here for change. A lot of people have fought for this inquiry, so I hope that this money given to this inquiry is put to good use.

In the name of love, I love and miss you, Aunty Laura and Aunty Bernie. You are ever loved and never forgotten. The world was better with you in it.

I used to work with Sisters in Spirit when it first began, and I compiled a portfolio here, and all the statements I made about the negative media attention, they're all documented here, so this -- I have fact and articles to back up what I'm saying, so it's all here.
There's pictures here. I put pictures in the midst of all the articles because these are people we're talking about; beautiful, beautiful people.

When I worked with Sisters in Spirit, we started researching the missing women in Edmonton, and I just have to say their names because I kept a list of their names, and there's so many more now, which is so sad, but I just -- I have to say these ladies' names because I think they've been my angels. Samantha Tayleen Berg; Lynn Minia Jackson; Rachel Quinney; Cheryl Lynn Black; Katie Sylvia Ballantyne; Melissa Munch; Debbie Lake, or also known as Debbie Darlene; Monique Pitra (ph); Edna Bernard; Vivian Rose Patty (ph); Kelly Dawn Riley (ph); Jessica Cardinal; Joanne Ghostkeeper; Lorraine Ray (ph); Cara King; Georgia Flint (ph); Gail Cardinal; Mavis Mason; Bernadette Ahenakew; Deanna Marie Bellows (ph); Rhonda Running Bird; Carrie Ottenbreit (ph).

I know there's many more of you ladies out there. God bless you, ladies. You deserve better. All my relations thank you.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Can we just get the pictures called up one at a time, please. Can you tell me who's in this picture?

**MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** That's Bernadette Ahenakew, and she's holding her youngest son, so...
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Can we get the other picture, too, please.

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: And that's Laura Ann Ahenakew and the late Melanie Dawn.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And you were talking about your portfolio.

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: Yeah.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And just -- may I just hand it to the commissioner just to take a quick look?

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: Sure.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: We will have an entire photocopy of this to be submitted, but I would like to just let you see it for one minute.

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: You can look at it if you want. The first articles are about Laura, so...

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: As the commissioner's flipping through that, may I ask, you talked about the fact that when you were working with Sisters in Spirit that you started compiling this portfolio because you wanted to capture a lot of the points that you shared with us --

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: Well, we actually -- we received a grant, and we got a researcher to start looking into names and whatnot, and we began to compile a list. Now, there was a lot of other
research -- you know, there's lots of people -- this is
done before. This was done before, but for some reason, it
got media attention, and it wasn't always positive.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** In this book,
though, it's -- the beginning's mostly about your family.

**MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Yeah. The beginning
of the portfolio is about -- like, it's all the news
clippings during the trial of Laura, and then it goes on
to -- whatever -- there wasn't too much in the -- in the
media about Bernadette. I think the biggest article was
when they located the body, and they had not yet identified
her, but a missing persons report had been filed, and so
the RCMP contacted my mother, and we positively -- she was
positively identified through the earring and then
through -- you know, she had to see her and positively
identify her, but the earring gave it away because my
mother had bought her those for Christmas.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** May I ask you a
question?

**MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** It really bothered
me -- like, I know that she was found nude, but that
bothered me all the time, reading that again and again, and
any time they wrote about her, it was Bernadette Ahenakew,
comma, a known prostitute. What the heck was the purpose
of that? I guess to some it matters --
COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: (Indiscernible)

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: -- but it's another human being.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yeah. But as far as you know, that had nothing to do with any investigation?

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: No.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yeah.

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: No.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So is it fair to say that your own lived experience and going through and experiencing everything around the two deaths of two loved family members actually impacted your career path and some of the advocacy that you've done in your life?

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: When I advocated for my aunts, like I said, I just did it out of love. I -- I wasn't seeking to carve out a career for myself on the backs of my aunts. I'm not out to put them out for my own gain, and I don't support anybody who does that, but I spent a lot of time and energy doing that. I've stepped away from it all because it got quite territorial, and that's -- I -- I want no part of that. I just want justice.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And in terms of -- you have your own children now, and you've spoke of
your aunt's children and their children. What are ways that we -- we as an inquiry -- could actually commemorate or memorialize the lives of these women so that the pride and the necessary respect is given so that those children get to hear those stories too?

**MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** The information that I brought, this portfolio I made, you know, it's for -- to share. We have nothing to hide. You know, I've said what needed to be said. To us, they'll live on in our hearts forever. They're never forgotten. There was a way we could tell these stories and share them with other people. We could share these stories with other families and let them know that they're not the only ones because when you're going through it, you feel all alone with your sadness, especially with Laura. You know, we -- it's like we couldn't go outside, being bombarded by media, couldn't turn on the radio, couldn't watch TV, couldn't -- you know, so -- I would like to see strong support systems put into place for families that are going to trial, and it would be nice to see somebody when the media starts attacking families, because when you attack the victim, who is -- who cannot speak and stick up for themselves from the grave, it's the families that hurt. Somebody needs to speak to this, and I know the media cannot be controlled. I know that's hard. There's freedom of speech, but let's stop
supporting these people who sensationalize these crimes. That would help everybody.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** You've actually provided us a lot of information, but I always want to make sure that we haven't missed anything or that if there's anything you wanted to add, that you have the opportunity to do so, so if there is anything, please, please feel free to share it with us.

**MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Yeah. I just want to offer prayers, love, and support to all the families that are here. My heart bleeds right along with you. This is really hard. People say we're brave, but we're here because of love, so I commend you all, everybody who came here to speak. Now we go home, and we grieve again.

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Commissioner Robinson, did you have any questions or comments for Joanne?

**COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I want to finish looking through this before we're done. When -- I have a couple of questions. When you were going through the court process for Laura's murder, did you get any victim support? Were there -- was there anything in place for you and your family during that time?

**MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** I was just a kid at the time during the trial. I -- I remember my mother
shutting down. I remember her going to the trial every day
and coming home and crying herself to sleep every night.

Now, whether anybody offered her any help, I'm not sure,
but I don't think at the time, with everything that was
going on, I'm not sure that -- you know, that she was ready
to access it. I guess we -- we turned to our spirituality
for support and each other, and that's where it came from,
but, you know, my mother and -- you know, we've all since
gone -- you know, did some counseling and -- and talked
this stuff through, but it never -- when you lose somebody
the way we did, my aunts were disrespected so badly; how do
you get over that? You don't. It's hard, and it's been
years, and, you know, I thought, you know, I can get
through this talk without crying. Yeah, right. It -- it
never gets easy.

My mother has cancer right now. My
mother -- this broke my mother's heart, broke all our
hearts. It's like our heart broke, so we started mending,
and then someone else died, and we actually have another
aunt that was found in Vancouver under suspicious
circumstances. She could be a possible third. Who knows?
We've just lost too many.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I don't have
any other questions. I want to take time to look through
this, and -- but I do want to -- I've heard from other
families the impact media had, you know, as a -- as a positive tool, either they covered a disappearance well or they don't, and the sensationalizing, the stereotyping.

I heard one recommendation about, like, a code of ethics when it comes to reporting about Indigenous women generally and Indigenous peoples. Do you have thoughts on that? Like, is that something...

**MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** Definitely. When I worked with the Sisters in Spirit campaign, I was the vice president of the Native Women's Association here in Edmonton. I was very politically active with the Sisters in Spirit, and if you go through that portfolio --

**COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** I see.

**MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW:** -- there's actually an editorial written -- I won't name him. I can't stand him. He -- he wrote an article basically, like, cutting the research that we presented down, and -- you know, base -- it's just an insulting article, and, you know, for days, I wrote many responses. Then I thought to myself, is it worth it? Is -- will I be just, you know, playing into what this person wants? Will it be sensationalized more? Right? Will I be dragged through the mud again for speaking my truth?

And I spoke of the territoriality between groups, like I said -- you know, and it should be
emphasized -- this is an issue that's owned by the families, not any organization. I even had a woman write an editorial agreeing with this man. I'm not sure the purpose of that. Then again, I sat down, I wanted to write a response to the media to that, but you know what? I never engaged. These people were never worth that to me, and you're -- you know, there should be, but will they follow that? You know, how do we -- how do -- how does that get monitored? I think that's fantastic idea, but how would we effectively put that into place, right? There's so many forms of media now. Now there's the internet, and -- you know. There's so many -- I looked up my aunts' names on the internet one time, and there were some anonymous writer writing details -- like, basically a story up to how Bernadette died, and I wrote this person back, saying, how on earth could you possibly know this? Person never responded, so -- I don't know how we would control that, but I am in full support of something like that.

I always wondered, you know, did Melanie Dawn, who never met her mother, knew her name, did she find these articles? Like, we never got to explain how beautiful Laura was. Never got the chance. I always wondered how this might have negatively impacted the daughter she never met, reading these kind of things that were untrue. They're very damaging. Like, it's very
COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I think you hit the nail on the head when you said they lose sight.

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: Sure do.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yeah. I want to thank you. Those are my questions. I want to -- I want to stop talking, and I want to look -- continue going through the book. I don't know if you want to keep -- if you want to adjourn, and I can sit in those chairs and do it. I'm fine with that.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Yes, please. If we could take 10 minutes, 15? What would you prefer?

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: Give everybody a chance to look?

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yeah.

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: Yeah.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Yeah.

MS. JOANNE AHENAKEW: Yeah, there's a lot there.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: So 15?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: When's your next --

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Fifteen works.

Thank you.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So yes, if we could adjourn for 15 minutes and recommence at that time.
COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I'm going to -- and you're going to explain.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Pulling rank. I'm giving the gifts, and you explain it.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. Certainly.

So what the commissioner is actually about to give you is a gift, and it's a gift of gratitude because you've shared your story. We really -- what the Commission is doing is -- wrapped in the red is an eagle feather, and so the matriarchs in Haida Gwaii had made an instruction that anyone sharing their truth should be given an eagle feather, and then a national call-out was made so that people would provide eagle feathers, and it's just really to honour you for sharing your story.

And the other thing is seeds. There's a package of seeds, and the seeds, we hope that, you know, out of the growth of new life with the plant that -- it represents new growth, and we hope that if you do plant and grow them, that you'll take pictures and send them back to us.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You're welcome.

Thank you for coming.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You know what, you think you come in just for healing, but actually, you're
Joanne Ahenakew (Laura & Bernadette Ahenakew)

coming here to give us -- you give us a gift of healing. I want to thank you for that. Hay-hay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You're welcome.

Thank you for coming. Thank you for coming.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Please step down and have a break.

(SHORT PAUSE)

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Good afternoon. I just wanted to formally announce that all of the hearings in this space for today are now closed. There will be a closing ceremony that will occur here at 5 p.m., so the room will be open again this afternoon at 5. This hearing is actually complete now, and so -- there is still another public hearing, actually, ongoing in Public 2, and as I said, you're welcome, all, please, to come back for the closing ceremony.

Exhibits (code: P1P05P0302)

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

Exhibit 2: Scan of photo album presented to Commissioner Robinson during the public hearing; 104 pages

--- Upon adjourning at 1:30 p.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Jenessa Leriger, 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.

Jenessa Leriger
February 16, 2018