National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Public Hearings
Siniktarvik Hotel & Conference Centre Salon A/B
Rankin Inlet, Nunavut

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Wednesday February 21, 2018

Public Volume 47(a)

Sophie Nashook,
In relation to Della Ootoova

Heard by Commissioner Qajaq Robinson
Commission Counsel: Shelby Thomas

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| | 2 | **PUBLICATION BAN** Report of Post-mortem Examination of Jochebed Della Ootoova, Office of the Chief Coroner, Provincial Forensic Pathology Unit, Case #A-533-08, Date of autopsy June 9, 2008. Note: There is handwriting on the cover correcting the marital status of Della Nashook (21 pages including attachments). | 10 |
--- Upon commencing on Wednesday, February 21, 2018 at 9:25 a.m.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Good morning Commissioner Robinson. I am Shelby Thomas, and I am a lawyer with the National Inquiry. I'm Métis from Manitoba and I wanted to take the time to thank the people of this community as welcoming me as a guest in their territory. This morning we will be hearing from Sophie Nashook who will be sharing the story of Della Ootoova. Mr. Registrar, Sophie would like to swear on the bible.

**REGISTRAR:** Good morning Sophie.

**MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK:** Hi.

**SOPHIE NASHOOK, Sworn:**

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Sophie, if you can start this morning by sharing with Commissioner Robinson and introducing yourself briefly and where you're from?

**INTERPRETER FOR MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK:**

*(Speaking in Inuktitut).* My name is Sophie Nashook, I'm from Pond Inlet. We used to call Della Ootoova Jochebed in our community. She was my sister-in-law. Jochebed was from Pond Inlet. She died in 2008. She used to go to Arctic College. During her time at Arctic College she also worked part time as an interpreter at the Health Centre. She had two children, a son and a daughter.
She had a husband, Amos Ootoova. Jochebed has many sisters, older sisters, siblings, brothers. Her brother, the oldest, died recently, a year and a half ago.

Elijah Nashook is my husband. My sister-in-law lived in Iqaluit and she worked at the Elder Centre. Her husband has passed away and my in-law also died recently. It's been four years now.

Jochebed died in 2008 during the springtime. It seems there was a drinking party whereby her husband beat her to death. As the sister-in-law I couldn't talk about it. My husband was mentally affected, he was in pain. So were my elderly in-laws.

Out of love and respect for them I could not speak to this issue for she was my friend, my sister-in-law. We used to joke around quite a bit, and we'd kid each other, and we'd stay together and keep each other company. I'm very close with my in-laws. We like to share jokes and laugh together.

Upon her death in 2008, a month later the husband returned to Pond Inlet with their children, their son and their daughter. However, I pursued the matter with the husband. I looked at him, I forced him to look at me, to face me. I wanted to know why he did what he did out of anger. I was angry.

The Coroner kept the body under their
premises and then the body was sent out for an autopsy to be done.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** (Indiscernible) the Coroner's Report. Would you take the time to explain to the Commissioner what -- what is in the Report? Just a point of clarification. There's writing, handwriting on top of this. Is this the writing of the author or -- there are some handwritten notes that I see in here, do you know who wrote those?

**INTERPRETER FOR MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK:** My relative with the last name of Nashook/Ootoova wrote those handwritten notes. I have not see the report myself, you see. My in-law kept the report for a long time, but I did not look at it whenever I came to Iqaluit. My in-law saw them and read them. My older sister-in-law translated it for them so they could read what it -- what it says. So my elderly in-laws did see what the result was and how she died.

We waited for a full year for the report from the Coroner's offices. In the case of any murder, one should not have to wait for a year for an autopsy report. There has to be a faster way of delivering these things to the affected families. I know the Coroners are busy, that's obvious to us. But others have received reports much sooner than that timeframe that we dealt with. We
waited for a full year for the report. The body was buried in Iqaluit. It was never returned to Pond Inlet.

My in-law is also buried next to her body. Other relatives, her siblings who had died previous to her, are also buried in the same graveyard close to her. My husband went to see his mother's grave the following day, if not the same day. After his visit and five days later, I too went to see the grave of my mother-in-law, and I placed some floral wreaths on her grave while I was there.

Waiting for the Coroner's Report for a full year, my -- my in-laws would seek confirmation of its arrival and the answer was, "We're still working on it". We wanted to know what was done to her body, where the violence occurred on her body physically. We had an idea of what or how it happened, but we weren't all there during their drinking party you see.

Why is it that men hurt and beat women? I thought the point of our union was love and caring. We as women are happy when we are loved, it's a very joyous relationship. It's very, very fearful when we get beaten up in a drunken state. There is no place to go, there is no shelter, there is no one to talk to, and so we lose our strength and our train of thought as to plan some sort of escape.

I have a granddaughter, a little girl that
Sophie Nashook (Della Ootoova)

lives here in Rankin Inlet. With her brother they live with their father. The little girl is named Jochebed after Della, and my in-laws loved the little girl very, very much because they were still with us when the little girl was born. And she's named after my daughter. I too love her so very much, she's named after Jochebed. To other cultures it may mean just a name, but naming people in our culture is very important to us, especially when they've died unexpectedly.

Waiting for the report is very, very stressful for so long. As a recommendation I would suggest very strongly that they produce these Coroner's Reports to the ailing families much sooner than a year. That would be best for us.

After going through the trauma over the murder, having no one to talk to, to relate to. When you go and talk to the other cultures and their staff, we speak about information such as you will be here for six weeks and after that time you will feel better.

I have been angry about these sorts of conversations, Why did you just say that, that I will -- we will be here for six weeks and once you get the help you need, once you have the counselling you require and it's all over with, I will have no one to continue the aftercare with. There's no other place for me to seek that kind of
Twice I have walked out of the Mental Health Service offices and I was struggling. What we need are good -- is good mental health support in the communities where we don't have to get flown out every time there's a tragedy of some nature. You can then have access for health support, including mental health support, in the communities.

We are the true landowners of our communities. It would be ideal for those who suffer not to have to fly out for counselling every time there's a tragedy. Why can't we have them in our communities now?

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Questions for Sophie?

**INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:**

(Speaking in Inuktitut) Is it okay if I ask a few questions Sophie? Jochebed, you said husband. Was -- was he ever charged by the R.C.M.P.?

**INTERPRETER FOR MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK:** I don't -- I haven't heard whether he was charged or not, but after two or three days -- he was in jail for two or three days in Iqaluit. That's where they lived at the time. And they released him because there was lack of evidence.

**INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:** Did they think that he murdered her?

**INTERPRETER FOR MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK:** They
never -- they never even considered that. They just
arrested him after she had been -- when she passed away.
Then they moved back to Pond Inlet with his children.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
This paper that was just given to me, have you see it?
Would you -- do you want to comment on it, or is it too
heavy for you?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK: It's
too heavy, it's too hard, and I don't want to talk about
it.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
I'll -- I'll read it. I want to say thank you to you,
because even though it's a really hard, heavy thing to talk
about and you were able to. Jochebed, when she passed
away, would you want to expound on that, so we could
remember her as well? Your memories, your fond memories,
if you would -- if you would like to talk about her a bit?

INTERPRETER FOR MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK: I can
remember her. We used to laugh together, we would visit
together, visit each other. And she worked in Pond Inlet.
She was a recreation coordinator, an employer researcher,
Human Resources. She was an outreach worker with the
Hamlet. Oh, Business Development Officer for people who
were applying for employment insurance, and she would go on
local radio and announce the jobs that were available.
There were a lot of people that got gainful employment because of her, and some of them are still working. One of them is an interpreter in Health Centre. Jochebed helped her get the job because she was -- that was what she did.

Jochebed had curly hair, she was smiling all the time, and she would always joke around and make us laugh when they were living in Iqaluit. When there was no place for people to stay, when the boarding home was too full, she would get phone calls and she would welcome them into her home. And when people stayed over they would always joke around and tell funny stories. You could remember her fondly.

**INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:**
The pictures on the monitor, would you like to talk about those pictures?

**INTERPRETER FOR MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK:** That picture was taken in a church just before New Year's. We took that picture. She wanted her picture taken so she would be seen, and that's why she had her head up. She's saying I'm here when she was taking -- her picture taken.

This one, I got this picture from her daughter, it's black and white. Her daughter had that picture. I don't know where that picture was taken, but I could recognize the background as Pond Inlet.
This picture, there was a person who owned a Pool Hall business, she would go and play pool, play with other people. She had lots of male friends as a young adult. This was taken in the Pool Hall, this picture.

I loved her, she was my friend. I have forgiven her even though she treated me not as well as she could have. We were good to each other. I know -- we all know that all our family hated all this. You can't always be happy together, you fight every now and again, and then forgive each other again. Be mad for awhile and then you forgive them and then would be friends again. I loved Jochebed.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:
I don't have any more questions. If you have any more comments, and if not, I'd like to ---

INTERPRETER FOR MS. SOPHIE NASHOOK:  I have no -- no big things to say anymore. However when people pass away we think that as long as they don't take forever to let the family know what the cause of death was. When they want to hear they start worrying, and then they turn towards alcohol. All of us do that waiting from the results from the Coroner.

And then we need more mental health workers in our communities that come from the community. I know everybody can speak English now, and in Inuktitut as well
they speak both languages. If we have a mental health
worker in our community -- from our community. Thank you.

INTERPRETER FOR COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON:

Thank you as well.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: We won't be back here
for another public session until -- until after lunch,
which I believe is one. So we'll stop for now, thank you.

--- Exhibits (code: P01P11P0201)

Exhibit 1: Folder of images displayed during the public
testimony of Sophie Nashook.

Exhibit 2: **PUBLICATION BAN** Report of Post-mortem
Examination of Jochebed Della Ootoova,
Office of the Chief Coroner, Provincial
Forensic Pathology Unit, Case #A-533-08,
Date of autopsy June 9, 2008. Note: There
is handwriting on the cover correcting the
marital status of Della Nashook (21 pages
including attachments).

--- Upon adjourning at 9:53 a.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

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

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Sherry Hobe

May 8, 2018