National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Public Hearings
Hotel North Two, Conference Room
Happy Valley-Goose Bay,
Newfoundland-and-Labrador

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Public Volume 56
Sylvia Murphy

Heard by Commissioner Qajaq Robinson

Commission Counsel: Meredith Porter

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Non-appearance
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Hearing - Public

Sylvia Murphy

Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador

--- Upon commencing on Thursday, March 8, 2018 at 11:42 a.m.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Good morning,
Commissioner Robinson. We’re here today to hear the
evidence of Sylvia Murphy. And I’m going to pass the mic
to each of her support people and ask them to introduce
themselves to you.

MS. TANYA FORMLOCK (PH): Good morning, my
name’s Tanya Formlock, I’m Sylvia’s cousin.

MS. JADE HARPER: Good morning, and my name
is Jade Harper, Anishinabe-que, and I’m here to sit with
Sylvia as one of my relatives.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Good morning, I’m
Sylvia. I come from a long line of Mi’kmaw, the -- the
Duheart (ph), the Breg (ph), the Duvals (ph), the Benoits
from the west coast of Newfoundland, and I’m here to tell
about me.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Thank you. And prior
to hearing from the witness, I’m going to ask at this time
that she be promised in.

MR. REGISTRAR: Hi, Sylvia.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Hello.

SYLVIA MURPHY, Affirmed:

MR. REGISTRAR: Okay. Thank you.
MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Thank you. And so with that, Sylvia, I’ll ask you to begin at your beginning.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Okay. My beginning.
I’ve been here since yesterday listening to a lot of the interviews and -- pertaining to the systems of child welfare, right on through -- through the justice systems.

I -- at the age of six I became half orphaned from my father that burned to death in a house fire because of family violence between my mother and father. My father was an alcoholic, and on the 28th of June, 1963 he left my mother a widow with eight children.

I know I was only six or seven years of age, but the welfare didn’t do too much for us. The house that we lived in was taken from us. The -- we were put in a slum with no toilet in the house, no bathtub. It did have running water, and that was for eight of us plus my mother.

The furniture that we were living in was furniture taken from the house from the house fire, you know, so that smell of smoke always comes back to you, it scares you, it’s something to live with -- that you live with all your life, you know.

The -- we lived there for a while and then my mother had another child and another baby died. And we went and moved from that house to a -- an apartment adjoined to a beer tavern on Conway Road in Curling.
At the time there was still seven babies and I guess mom being so young, you know, like, she wanted her nightlife too, I guess, and we were left alone an awful lot, and we had drunks coming in through the backdoor and through the front door, you know. But that’s where the society, the welfare society let us live.

And I know in grade 2 I went to school. My mother was very handy at turning coats and everything and -- cause everything was handed down. So you’d look at your sister and say, Don’t beat that up because I got to wear it next year, you know. But to go with no boots on, it’s like no one really cared about us. You had a winter coat and leggings at the time, but no winter boots, you know. You know, wait for a jumbo sale, try to get a pair of boots. I can remember hearing mom saying, you know, like, time’s really hard. You only get 425 for the younger children and 625 for the older children. So when you have seven that you’ve got to clothe and everything, there was just very little, you know.

She used to lock the groceries away in the cupboards, you know. My brother was really funny, though, cause he’d take the hinges off, so you didn’t have to worry about the lock, he still got in and stole the food.

But after that my mother had another child, and then that was from ’63 to ’67 then she put us -- five
of us in an orphanage on the east coast of Newfoundland. And I have all the records from the Social Services from here in this province, of the correspondence of everything that went through. You know, my mother wrote, “I have eight savages that I cannot take care of”, you know, so five go to St. John’s and three stay in Corner Brook. And, of course, leaves and goes to Ontario, and then she had another baby and that’s the way that went.

You know, the -- 1969 the orphanage shut down, cause at the time the government figured we don’t need all these children in institutions, so they decided to put us out in foster homes, and I went through 13 of them. The third foster home we went to we were there for three and a half years, and my younger sister was raped every day by the oldest boy, the oldest man.

We went through -- 2002 she came to me and we said we -- she said, We have to do something about this. So we went to the police and we went in separate rooms under cameras and we gave our statements, you know, like, what can you tell us about his body, you know.

She was 11 and I was 13, you know, sneaking in the bedrooms in the nighttime putting their hands -- two brothers, two oldest brothers, putting their hands in underneath the blankets and hand over your mouth, don’t squeal, you know, and all this stuff. Hard to live with,
hey?

And it got to the point when my sister turned 13, we went to the social worker and she took the statement. I have a copy of the statement at home where she sat down at a manual typewriter and typed all this up, which we took to the police. And the police did the investigation and he came back and he said, the gentleman is guilty. Both gentleman are guilty, but the foster father figured that we were really good maids to have, you know.

To walk -- I used to walk -- talk about Johnny Cash and Walk the Line. I walked every line for three and half years frightened to death in the nighttime getting off the bus. No one came to pick me up on the bus stop, and I had to walk and then go home then and she had six other foster children and used to have to bathe them and feed them and put them to bed, and then do my homework -- well, do the dishes before that. But we were just little slaves there.

Anyway, when we were -- we got -- they brought us back to the foster home to get our clothes and they put us in an emergency foster home for about a week. So from there they wanted you to go find your own foster homes, so I used to wonder, what jobs -- what kind of job is a social worker that can’t even look for a home for you?
Meanwhile, I had a mother that didn’t want to be a mother, so it didn’t really make much difference, you know. Like, here’s a total stranger who’s just doing a job, and if she didn’t want to care for me, and my mother didn’t want to care for me, so who really cared?

Anyway, so you found a place to live, but between the jigs and the reels, when I turned 17, I graduated grade 11 at the time. I had to get out of the system. I couldn’t stay on welfare anymore, and I didn’t have foster care. No one told me where to go, how I was supposed to live. I found a boarding house for $25 a week, and I registered at the College of Trades and Technology, and they paid me $25 a week to go, and that’s how I lived.

And only for -- they liked me and they -- they used to give me food, but in October I was awarded -- I can’t say I won -- they awarded me with $1,000 scholarship. There was five of us. Three were from the orphanage and the other two had gone through the welfare system, so I felt really privileged, you know, I got $1,000 scholarship.

But only for that I would never have survived that year, but then -- well, getting back to where we went to the police about the rape and molesting and everything else, they came back to us and said they couldn’t charge the man. They know that he’s guilty, they
know that his brother’s guilty, and, like, Allen Ruby and
Gerald Ruby are still living there and we do not want
nothing from these people, you know, they are rich people,
they own a lot of agriculture land down the Ruby Line and
the Goulds.

We do not want nothing from them, we just
want our justice. We want to be able to say that we were
not Clarence Lock’s (ph) little savages, you know, but
that’ll never be done. Never. No one really wants to say,
Well, maybe there should be some justice for Sylvia and her
sister, you know. So -- but then the policeman’s not going
to go and sue the government, their boss, are they?

So from there we just move on and we try to
live, you know. I landed a government job. Pretty lucky
by fluke, you know. And then I landed a government job
with -- well, it’s a city job with the City of St. John’s.
Then I went away for about eight months and I came back, I
landed a job with the Federal Government, and I declared
being Mi’kmaw. That’s what it said, Mi’kmaw. So I ticked
it, I’m Mi’kmaw, not Mi’kmaq or anything like that, I’m
Mi’kmaw.

And it’s funny because all my life I knew,
you know, it wasn’t just a dirty neck I had there, cause
mother could never get the dirt off our necks. No one
wanted to play with us cause we were little savages, you
know, run wild, but I got the good job with the government and I used to see different things going on and I -- and after declaring that I was a Mi’kmaw, Mi’kmaq, never given any difference.

Like, it’s almost like you’re always last on the list, except only recently, you know, like, you can’t apply for that, you don’t have the qualifications, you’re not smart enough. I don’t know what they wanted from us, to see how smart we wanted to be. Doesn’t matter today if you’re a lawyer or doctor, if you’re Mi’kmaw, if you’re Indigenous, whatever -- Indian, whatever title you want to take. I don’t -- you know, like, to me, I came in here to this world with nothing, you know, like, the way you dress, does it make you a nice person? Does it make you who you are? I don’t think so, you know. Do you have jewelry? What difference do it make? If you’ve got children that are drug addicts, they’re going to steal it all on you anyway, so -- you know, like the value of everything really doesn’t have a value, you know.

You rent, you rent. If you live -- you’re lucky enough to find someone that’s going to marry you and not bring it up to you all the time, look at your background. You come from a dysfunctional family, that’s the way you are. Our marriage is never going to work, you know.
And then you go through life -- all the time you go through life and people say, Well, who are you? What difference do it make who I am? I mean, I’m -- I am me. I like to know the truth about things. I ask the truth. I ask questions and the questions have gotten me in so much trouble, you know, no one wants to give you an answer, to tell you the truth, you know. Why can’t you be truthful to me and say, No, I don't want you to be a part of this, you’re too outspoken. This is the way we do it. You don’t need to know why we do it that way. You know, in life, I mean, who is to say to you that you can’t answer, you can’t ask that question. The thing is, if you ask a question, you expect and deserve an answer. If that answer don’t come, you know that the person’s going to lie anyway, because if people hesitate, Mi’kmaw, they say you have two ears, one mouth, so you’re better off listening, but always have that time to reflect and find an answer that is true. And the truth come from your heart, you know.

When I went and -- and found the social worker who typed up that report on the manual typewriter, she said -- I said, Why didn’t you do anything when we reported the rapes? No, I took it to my supervisor and he told me to forget about it. So that’s a super -- a social worker who makes an oath the day that they become a social worker.
Almost a lot of the professional jobs, they all take oaths, you know, that they will, to the best of their ability be true and fair and honest, and have at least a little bit of a doubt when a small child is telling you what’s happening to them, you know.

So in life today, we’re still trying to find -- find out -- there’s no justice for none of my siblings. My two youngest brothers are passed away now, one at 28, one at 49. My younger sister’s got cancer. The two oldest sisters, I didn’t really know them because of the big separation, all those years. You know, visit once every two, three years, you don’t really know anyone, you know. You don’t feel close to them. I have sisters and brothers in the Mi’kmaw community that I feel more close to, that I can hug, and not expect anything from them, but I think as a -- for a sister or brother at least you expect a little bit of love. They might respect you, but a little of love goes a long way too, hey. But then there’s more expected of you as being a sister or a brother. You should be this way, you should be that way, you know, but then that’s the white man’s way of life, you know.

But there’s been no justice for us all this time. 2002 when that investigator came back and said to me, We cannot charge him, my whole world fell. I felt like my whole -- like I had been raped of everything, you know.
You figure you go, you tell your truth and no one really believes you.

Oh, sorry, I’m just getting carried away.

Yeah. I don’t know, in my life I’ve heard -- even lately, these stories, you know, like the bullying. I know so many people that bully, you know, and it’s funny because I had said to my grandson there two years ago, I said, Do you mind if Nanny borrows your bullying shirt for tonight? He said, Nan? I said, Yeah, well, it’ll fit me. I said, You’re 11, and I said, You wear a size medium, I said, It’ll fit Nan, you know.

So I wore it to a -- down to a drumming circle where I had felt I was being bullied, and I didn’t have to say a word. All the people that were there when we got in the circle, they knew, Jesus, Sylvia, can you ever make a statement. I said, I didn’t have to say anything. You wear the t-shirt, you know. Make no wonder I collect t-shirts all the time, but I was making a statement.

How many times do I have to say to someone, Could you please not bully me, you know. Do they have to zone in on you because you’re asking a question or zone out on you and -- and omit that you’re not even there, you know.

Like, I -- the last five years I’ve been -- I was involved with the Native centre in St. John’s, and to
me a Native friendship centre should be a place to be able
to go and drop in, have a cup of tea, sit down, have a
chat, play a game of cards, you know, have a game of bingo,
do whatever you want to do, but it’s so regimented, the
nine to five. Being Native is not nine to five, or not,
you know, like -- we shouldn’t have to say, Well, if I
don’t get there for the two o’clock teaching of making the
sealskin mittens -- first you got to get your name on the
list, and then they tell you there’s no list, you know.

Like, what is it that they’ve got to make
life so complicated for you? You know, whichever suits
them. So I gave up going to that Native centre because you
have to, you know, you walk in and -- I went there to --
for a Christmas party with my two grandchildren were there,
and I stood and I never felt so lonely. I said, What am I
doing here? This place is not for me.

When a year before that, oh, my heart used
to be doing summersaults to go down there, and I’d bake
something or always made sure I brought in something to eat
so we could have our tea, you know. And then go down in
the last year and they couldn’t even provide a can of
Carnation milk for you. You know, all you want is be able
to sit down, have a cup of tea, have a chat, you know,
without someone bossing you and ordering you what to do.
It’s supposed to be friendship, you know.
Anyone that’s working nine to five know

you’ve got to work, especially if you have strict bosses. Someone that’s -- you’ve got to be under the gun all the

time. So when you can go to a friendship centre and enjoy

yourself and give a hug, a friendship hug, you know, and no
talking about people, no putting down, adding on, leaving

off, cause this is what’s happening, you know. You’re

friendly to one of the -- one of your brothers, and oh, my

God, Oh, she’s having something to do with him, guaranteed,
you know. You can’t have a friendship, you know.

But society is like that, if -- if you’re a

single parent, which I was, you know, the husband goes out
to get the turkey and leaves Christmas eve, you know, kind

of thing, and that’s the truth, but then you’re looked at

in -- in your neighbourhood, in society by your co-workers.

You shouldn’t do that, you’re a single mother, but it’s

okay to do it if you’re still with your husband. What a
double standard life is, you know. You can’t do this, you

can’t do that. You should do this, you should do that.

You know, why don’t you just -- if someone
doesn’t put bread and butter on your table who gives them

the right how to live your life, you know, really. Who --

who says that you can’t do this, you know? How come your

children don’t have -- why have you got no child support

coming in? They have -- my children were learnt -- were
told they have to wait. You wait and see, but they got to realize that when mom says wait and see we’re going to get it, so -- might take a month to save it up and get it for them, but they got it, you know.

And this thing about rearing your children up and saying, Well, I want them to have more than what I had. Well, I had nothing, so -- nothing came easy, you know. When you start off on -- in life at 18, after getting one year of college with one little suitcase of clothes, that’s it to your name all your life. One suitcase of clothes. Would have been maybe another bag full, but foster -- other foster parents took the stuff and wouldn’t give it back to us, you know.

So -- but as far as -- I wanted to talk because I feel that there’s so much money being poured into all the different organizations. God knows there’s enough organizations. You know, you’ve got this -- this one is -- if you -- oh, yeah, if you get to Plan A you go to this organization, but if you don’t qualify for A go to B. Now, they’re the ones that’ll look after that for you.

Like, there’s -- why is the government putting so much money out in all these different programs and nothing actually being accomplished. Who’s happy? The Natives aren’t happy, I know that, you know. You lose your friendship with your Native friends because they’re not
going to the Native centre anymore, you know, so what --
what do they have to offer us? Not what we want, we want
to be able to go and enjoy. You’re going to do some --
some beading. Sit down for an hour or two beading, but if
you -- if you’re -- it’s regimented that you got to go from
one to three, you can’t go one to three if you’re working.
Nothing happens on Saturday or Sunday, you know.

So your children are in school all week,
they -- they don’t have the opportunity to go Saturday and
Sunday, so you’d bring it upon yourself to try to teach
your grandchildren or children the culture, you know. And
then there’s so many things that go on that you’re not even
invited to it because you’re not important enough to be
included.

Gee, that was a lot of talking, wasn’t it.

Another thing that wanted -- that I wanted to talk about
and why I wanted to speak was after Susan Aglukark spoke
last week. I went to see her on the 15th of February.
What an amazing program. The show was -- but, you know,
it’s funny, I could tell she was hurting, so my friend and
I went down after the concert and actually spoke with her
and hugged her and kissed her, and we laughed, you know.
And then three or four days later I see her on APTN live.
And when I heard what she was saying. I said, You know, if
she can do that I can do that too. She can stand up for
her rights, I will stand up for my rights. I will try, not only for myself, for everyone else that’s out there that needs some comfort in knowing that someone’s going to look at some of this.

It’s like today is what, the 8th? The 31st of March I’m no longer Mi’kmaw, I’m no longer status that I’ve fought since -- 1988 I started. 2000 I got -- 1980 I got the job with Federal Fisheries. I declared I was Mi’kmaw. 1988 I started calling the past president, told him who I was, not enough Mi’kmaw in you. So I’d call again every -- once a month, you know. No, we’re not accepting no one.

Then it gradually came upon with this new band that we’re going to be First Nations. I did it all, you know, I did -- I kept staples and running for about a week in photocopies, cost me a fortune, you know, and I declared -- I ticked all those boxes right. I proved everything, I had birth certificates and death certificates, pictures of the headstones, you know, and I got accepted in the second bout or -- or the second lot of people that got approved.

So I went and got my status card. Now, I only use it as identification because I like the reaction on the security people’s faces when they look at this First Nations card. Quite cool, the birds and buffalo and
everything all over it, but they look at it. What is that?
It says First Nations. Oh, you don’t have a driver’s
licence? I said, No, that one’ll do, you know. So it’s
funny when you -- when you look at how -- I don’t know if
the word is regimented, but you got to go with the norm.
Don’t -- don’t show me that First Nations card.

Anyway, I’m going to put that in an envelop
and send it right back to Indigenous & Northern Affairs,
cause it’s no good for me anymore. I can’t use it. I’ve
never used it to get that big $6,000 discount, tax break.
I haven’t used it for anything. Oh, that’s a lie. Last
year I went to Conne River and I got a little bit of money
off my cigarettes, you know. So that wasn’t too bad. But
that’s all I ever used it for.

Didn’t get no education for my girls.
Little bit of medicine, which thanks for the goodness that
my youngest daughter has no medical insurance at all, and
her two children, but from the 31st of March they’re not
going to have it now anyway, so. But I have a grandson
that fell and broke four teeth out, his permanent teeth,
and it’s going to cost us $8,000, but they have to wait
till he grows a bit to get a plate put in, cause they were
his permanent teeth and now they’re gone.

So to have that card would be a little bit
of help for him, but that all goes down the drain now.
Throw the card away. I don’t need the card, I’ve worked with the government all my life, you know. I’m insured, I can -- I can afford to pay the 20 percent, but for anyone that doesn’t have an insurance card, 100 percent’s a lot different, you know.

I have an oldest -- my oldest grandson, he was a pound and a half when he was born. He lived -- we were given seven days after he was born, actually it was my birthday, 44th birthday, and they wanted to know if -- if my daughter and I wanted to pull the plug on him, and we said no, we’re going to see. And he survived. He’s 240 pounds now, about five foot four, because he was given some Lupron shots when he was younger because with children with CP, they -- they go through a premature puberty, so at seven he was like a grown man, you know. But -- and ended up being blind, totally blind. So I think, like, his First Nations card would help a bit, you know.

But my daughter is married to an excellent man, a beautiful man who has taken my grandson on. They went out and they purchased an $80,000 vehicle and had it all equipped, and they did not use their First Nations card to get the $6,000 discount or $8,000 discount.

So to me this is true Mi’kmaw. This is not the ones that have a card so they can use it, so they get their children through -- through university or college, or
get their discounts on their cars, the big ticket items. You know, I didn’t look -- to me it’s a -- it was a gift that my grandparents finally recognized. My grandmother, you know. She was your typical barefoot pregnant in the kitchen. God lover her. She’s with me every day, you know, and I -- when I first got the letter saying I was approved, I cried and I laughed, you know, to think that, hey, mom, you know, geez, to finally recognize us for who we are. And then you get the letter a year or two later saying, You’re denied, sorry, made a mistake. You’re not Mi’kmaw anymore. At the end of the month, send back those cards.

When you’ve got maybe two-thirds of the people, yeah, they have some Native ancestry, but not -- my grandmother was born in 1911. This is 1918, a little over 100 years ago, and in that 100 years, it was my dad, myself, I was born in ’56, dad was born in ’31, my daughter was born in ’83, and my grandson was born in 2000. So that’s four generations in 100 years, and I don’t -- I don’t think it’s right for them to take that from me, but they can have it back. I don’t need -- I don’t need a card. I only use it for identification to strike up conversation at the airport, you know.

But I have to say the ones that do have their status cards that had to go back to the 17th century,
the turn of the 18th century maybe, and they’re going back six, seven, eight generations. Is it right for them to keep a card to say that they are Mi’kmaq when I’m -- grandmother’s 1910 and she’s Mi’kmaq but hid it away, you know. Don’t say you’re Mi’kmaq. You can’t say that, they’ll treat you bad.

And they’re still doing the same thing. This is 2018, and to me that’s making you feel bad because they take that card from you, your status. I got a letter, I got it framed up on my wall that I received the 30th of March, 2012 that states: Sylvia Louise Murphy, you are a Canadian Indian. I’m Indian, woo, you know, I got it up on the wall. I said, they can’t take that -- I’ll keep that there, I’m not sending that one back. They’re not getting that letter, cause who is anyone to look at me and say you’re not Mi’kmaq.

I’m not Mi’kmaq, can you imagine? I’ve -- I’ve been nothing all my life. Nothing all my life. I came in here with nothing, I finally get something that’s me, that’s my mom, my dad, my grandmother, my cousin who sits here, she’s not Mi’kmaq either, so what are we? You know, I don’t know what I am anymore. I’m not good enough to go here, I’m not good enough to go there. I’m not allowed to ask a question, don’t ask a question, for God’s sake cause you’re the worst in the world to ask a goddam
question, you know.

My heart is broken, really broken over it all, you know, and who’s anyone to look at me and say, goddam, girl, you’re not Mi’kmaw, you know, or you’re not Mi’kmaq, you know. Oh, God, and then they wonder why you stay in your house, why you don’t want to talk to no one. Half the things that I say and do is because I am a nervous person, I take my antidepressants. I have suicidal thoughts. I’ve had suicidal thoughts since -- since the end of January when I got my card -- my letter that states to me, You are denied. You are not allowed to be Mi’kmaw, you know.

I don’t give a gosh darn about anyone. I’ve gotten to the point -- this is the first time in my life that I’ve spoken up for me. Little Sylvia, you know, I’m not looking for pitty. I don’t care for pitty. A bit of love? But all I want is a bit of respect. My respect, I’m -- I’m not a person who gets off on the big head because you’re this and you get invited to that, and, oh, my God, the Minister’s coming to St. John’s. My dear, you can’t go because, sure, they wrote down and they said this is who they wanted to go, but it’s on my ceremony, you’re not a part of that. You can’t be invited to that. Your name wasn’t included. Imagine.

Now, I know Carolyn Bennett wants to know
who’s actually going to be at that ceremony, and she made sure that she put down who the people had to be. I don’t think so. I met the woman. I gave her a baseball hat with Top Chief on it, and she told me she’s worn it. I’m so proud of that. My sister wasn’t because she gave it to me. And it’s the truth. But it’s funny, isn’t it? You know, she looks at me and she says, My God, I got to wear that? You know, and then we were doing feathers, I said, Well, you better put a feather in that hat, my darlin’, you know.

But, no, I mean, who are -- who is anyone to tell me you can’t apply for that. Your name is not on the list. Now, they had a list, what happened to the list? The list got gone, you know, but I don’t know, I just want fairness. I don’t mind staying home.

Last year -- two years ago in July they had the garden party at the lieutenant governor’s house, at that big castle, that’s what I call it. And first -- I went there and I said, Gees, I’m going to mark that off my bucket list. So and that was fine, and I said, if I go here next year I’m going to wear my regalia. So I did and it was amazing how these two people, representatives of the queen, Mi’kmaw representatives, you know, from the queen. Our treaties state that it was -- we serve for the queen. She is over -- now, they stole the land, but that’s okay, we’ll get that back some day.
So anyway, we went there myself and my Inuit friend, Stan, and Stan brought his drum, Inuit drum, and Stan’s pink drum, so we kind of -- you know, like, it’s probably because everybody notices this pink drum, which would normally be blue, you know. And at the end of the -- the big performance, the British soldiers, here’s little Stan and I, we stand about the same height, I think, and we’re marching and Stan’s playing the drum and I’m singing, and there’s little, the little Natives, hey, one from -- from the woods, and one from up in the snow. And at the end of the ceremony the two -- well, I calls them Frank and Patty, I shouldn’t do that, but because they are, you know, His Worship and Her Worship.

But -- well, he grew up in Curling just down the street from me, and lived in a basement apartment. So he was the same as me, wasn’t he, you know. But the two of them came over and hugged us and thanked us for what we did. And I said, we came as who we are, Natives or Indigenous, whatever you want to call us. And people said, well, my God, they had some nerve to do that. Can you imagine, putting on our regalia and going down there and making a fool of ourself. But I’m -- I was here first, so it didn’t bother me, you know, I looked pretty -- beautiful pictures.

You know, I gave him some sweet grass, and
he said, Sylvia, what do I do with that? I said, Well, you can light it once a day and pray, you know, but I don't know if he ever lit it or not, doesn't matter, but we did -- we did that just to prove that we can do it. We don’t need to be invited by the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, or the Premier of Newfoundland-and-Labrador. It’s open to everyone.

So I figured when we got there, because you have to be very careful now when you meet someone who’s Canadian and you think that they’re from -- I don't want to sound racist, but it don’t -- I’m not racist, I’ve never been, but if you’re Jamaican or from the West Indies or from Japan, like, it’s against -- it’s racist to say to someone, okay, where are you from? Toronto. No, where are you really from? Tell me, because you’re not white, but I know people that -- I met an airline stewardess yesterday morning coming up here, oh, what a doll. She said she’s been mistaken for being Lebanese, and actually she’s Mi’kmaq from Cape Breton. Every nationality except for Mi’kmaq, you know.

So when we look at who’s invited and who’s not invited, or who we are, what we’re entitled to, you know, you’re not entitled to too much if you’re Indigenous. Although they have come a long way now. They might have 20 seats for a course, but at least -- one time it used to be
only one or two seats, now it’s up to about six. If you’re
Indigenous you can get in, if you get in one of those six
seats, but 30 years ago if it was just one or two seats,
Oh, you were out of luck. But at least they’re widening
the chances of getting on, hey.

I -- to me, I think that the system has to
change to accommodate everyone. Not only the white man,
the Canadian Africans, the Canadian Asians, the Canadian --
you know, like, Canadian Natives, Asian Natives Canadian,
like, you can’t -- you don’t know which way to speak to
people anymore. I mean, how many times would you look at
someone and say, Gee, where are you from, you know? And I
know my friends who are Inuit, they say, Sylvia, like, they
really think that they should be back up here in the north
because of the discrimination shown to them, you know. And
I said, We should all build our igloos and take some
pictures and put up our teepees and take some pictures, and
say, you want to come to Newfoundland-Labrador? This is
our tourism, igloos and teepees, you know.

But don’t think you’re going to find a true
Mi’kmaw or true Inuit because they won’t be there, you
know. They dress up in costumes, hey, you know. I said,
Well, by the time the end of the month comes on -- whatever
it is on -- on the auction -- not auction site, for sale
sites and that, there’s going to be some regalia for sale
cause no one will wear them no more, cause they’re not Mi’kmaw no more, hey. The government tells you, You are not Mi’kmaw, you know.

But I’ll tell you, they’re not taking who I am from me. They can have the card. Didn’t -- well, it did cost me cause I had to go and get photographs done, and then I had to go to Commissioner of Oaths and stamp to make sure that who I am -- that person in that picture was me, hey, you know. But they can have the card back. I still got the certificate on the wall. I’m starting to sound like my grandmother.

When -- when Confederation -- it’s funny, because she kept her Newfoundland card, hey. I don't know who has it now, but someone in the family must have it, you know. She used to always say she was building this boat down in the basement, and when it was built she was going to bring it up and put them all in the boat and put them all out sailing, and it wasn’t a canoe either. It was a boat, she could put a lot in. Get out to sea, you know.

Anyway, I don't know what else -- what am I after forgetting, darlin’? I’m -- have been saying an awful lot, haven’t I?

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Thank you, Sylvia.

You had mentioned that you spoke about your experience growing up in the child welfare system as a foster child,
and you spoke about some of the abuse that you experienced while in that system. And then you also said that you had left the system at 17 years old, and really were left without very little direction and were, I guess, left, for the lack of a better term, to fend for yourself. Can you give a little bit of background in how you think the system could have supported you better upon -- you know, as you approached that age of 17 and when you did leave the system and -- and -- to -- to support young people?

**MS. SYLVIA MURPHY:** Well, there has to be something put in place. I know that -- I knew as of the 20th of August of 1974 I was no longer -- I had to be out of that foster home that I was in cause I was going to go to college, but what was I going to do? I was just thrown out to the wolf. I had to go find somewhere to live. I couldn’t go look for a foster home, so I found a boarding house, you know. But there wasn’t one social worker, nothing, who came -- anyone said to me, Sylvia, these are the things that are in place for you, you know. And I know that’s ’74, that’s a long time ago, hey, but still I don't think that things have changed very much, you know. Like, they need to be able to say, You’re going to be all right. We’re going to do this for you. We’re -- we’ll give you a list of boarding houses, cause it’s only you that can make a decision if you don’t
like there -- like it there or not. Well, they don’t give you too much to live off to be -- to have an apartment for yourself, you know, but I’ve never gone to that degree to have to do that, you know, cause once I got a job, I mean, you know, you move in you only got one suitcase, into an apartment, oh, what do I do now? Just suitcase, clothes. So you work for about two weeks and you’re saying, okay. My brother came home to visit me and he gave me a blanket, a blue satin bound blanket, set of sheets and a camping set that was two pots and the covers were the plates, and the steel forks and knives and spoons, and two -- two or three cups. So that was my cutlery and my cookware, you know, but I don’t know if today -- but things have to be written out for people to know that they -- they are not at a dead loss.

And -- cause it brings in the topic as well, the drug addictions, and, well, the substance abuses and the alcoholism and everything. People feel that they cannot stop because where are they going to go? Even if they sign into detox, and they only keep you in detox for seven days, where do you go after that? Out to a flea-infested boarding house, which the welfare pays for, whichever department they call it now, will pay for, and they don’t know where to go to get -- same as the foster children. Where do I go? What do I do? How am I going to
get food? You know, where am I going to live? What programs are there for me?

There has to be something so that someone can say, This is what you do. Here’s the manual, you know. Like, no one gives you a manual on how to be a parent or how to be a good daughter, good son, how to be a good mom, or how not to be a Mi’kmaw. There’s no manuals, but there should be something in place to let people -- these young children know that this is what you can do, this is where you can go.

My youngest daughter is a drug addict, and she’s a full year now clean. I think tomorrow might be her anniversary, but the programs that are in place for these young people, she did not know a thing about it until she went and hit rock bottom, but you need someone to be the advocate for you, someone to call and say, This is the phone number, you know. You start off at detox, you go in there, there will be a counsellor there.

You know, I think a lot more kids would be a lot happier and off the streets and off a lot of the drugs if they knew they had a choice, that they’re going to be able to go somewhere and take a shower, take a bath. Put on some clean underwear, clean socks. There’s going to be someone to talk to, you know. Someone’s going to be there to hold your hand when you’re going through the detox, you
know, like, if it’s not put out there you don’t know what’s there, you know.

And how many people know that in St. John’s that you can go and pick up some Pampers for your child, you know. That there are places you can go and buy -- not buy it, pick up a bag of Pampers. These people that are down and out for whatever reason. The mother’s off drinking or doing drugs. The father’s off drinking, doing -- for what -- but there’s something there for the children, you know. You can go get a meal, you know.

It’s like -- like the -- the food banks. There’s no food in the banks anymore. They can’t realize -- they don’t realize how many people are actually going to the food banks that are living in $350,000 homes. Why would you need to go to a food bank if you’re living in a -- a big house like that?

Christmas hampers. They deliver Christmas hampers to these people, and big gifts all underneath the tree, but they can’t afford to go buy their food, so they take it away from the people that need the food. Write it out, let people know. Let them know that there’s places to go. Here’s the phone numbers, you know. Here’s a person that I know that works there. Give her a call, give him a call, they’ll help you, you know.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: Thank you.
Commissioner Robinson, do you have any questions or comments for the witness?

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Do you mind if I ask you some questions?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Oh, I’m ready for you.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Okay. Can you -- the issues around identity and your status card, we want to talk about that a little bit more, but can you explain to me a little bit how are they taking this away from you? How is that happening?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: I’m denied.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: So -- so what I’ve learned so far is status cards have an expiration date.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Yeah, mine is the -- I think it’s 24th of February, 2024.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: So after a certain period you have to re-apply.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: No, I guess you get a new card then, but mine -- mine -- mine is not expired.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: They’ve revoked it?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Can you -- have you been explained why? How is that happening?
MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Well, the letter states that you do not meet the qualifications that have been put in place.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: And this is Indian Act qualifications?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Well, I got my letter --

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Okay.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: -- saying I’m an Indian, you know. I’m quite proud of that too.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M’hm.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: But there’s 100,000 or more -- I know an awful lot of people. My family.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yeah.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Ninety-eight of us. Ten got on, you know. And the other families are like that, you know. But I -- the letter states that they did nothing -- I didn’t do anything wrong. I told them who I was, but they’ve changed the rules halfway through the game, hey. But this is all in court now.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Okay.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: There’s three court cases on the go. But once they take my name off that list that’s in place now in Canada, once they take my name off, I’m not an Indian no more.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: And when you
say, “they”, it’s the Government of Canada?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Okay. I just want to be clear.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Yeah, the -- yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Can you share a little bit with what impact that has. I’ve heard from other women as well, this idea that your identity is linked to this card and it can be given and then taken. And you’ve shared a little bit about that. Do you want to share a little bit more about the impact that has had on you?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Well, it makes you not want to -- well, you question yourself, you know, right? I mean, I -- I’ve spent months looking at that list. I think there’s 23,000 or something on the list, maybe 22,000, but they’re saying the final number will be 18,044 that will carry a card. Sounds almost like a concentration camp, you know, like -- but, you know, like, there’s a difference when they don’t -- someone goes back to the 17th century to get that little bit of Aboriginal -- from an ancestor, oh, yeah. My fourth great grandmother, you know, she was Indian.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M’hm.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: So I passed all that, so
they say. And then they put me on a point system and, like, I’ve -- I’ve wrote an email, actually, to the chief, and I explained it all out. And I said, I just want an answer to this. If I was given my status on ancestry and I -- I self-identified, I should be given -- well, I don’t believe in the point system, but at least I should have 13 or more points there, shouldn’t I? Right? And -- well, I never got an answer back, but my point is, you know, like, you can get one extra point for this and up to two points for this, you know, if you’re active in the community or if you live near the community, you know. Or do you visit the community. Send some proof that you called home.

    You know, you got to go back to 2008 -- 2008, can you imagine? And try -- I have no problem digging up phone bills cause I don’t throw nothing out, but a lot of people everything is just garbage, hey. But, you know, to prove and pictures that you -- you were at a pow wow or you made it in the newspaper or something, right? You know, to prove that you were -- you visited, you called home, you know, like -- and, I mean, I was rearing a little boy that’s blind with cerebral palsy. I couldn’t get across to Corner Brook as much as I wanted to, you know.

    There’s no vehicles, no busses that run from St. John’s to Corner Brook or to Flat Bay or wherever, to be able to attend the pow wows without having a special bus
to take the little boy in, so I didn’t get to go there, you
know. But that shouldn’t have mattered, I should have been
there anyway, hey.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: And what
you’re describing is other people’s expectations of what
your Indigenous Mi’kmaw Ilnu, yeah?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Identity, you
having to prove it for them, and it’s linked to government
policy, whatever, whatever, whatever, but for you, for
Sylvia?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: How does this hurt me?

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: No, I want to
know where that comes from. Like, if government needs to
know who’s Indigenous and who’s not, what should they look
for, rather than this maze that they make you jump through?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: I -- well, to me, I
mean, I’ve -- I’ve got church records, birth certificates,
death certificates, copies of the headstones where people
are buried, you know. And I -- and I -- I try to educate
people what I know about my family, and they realize, Oh,
my God.

You know, like, I met one gentleman here
last night, and I said, Did you know that great great Uncle
Ben was a murderer? And he said, No, who in the hell is
great Uncle Ben? You know, but -- no, but the things that
have happened, you know, and to share that with a third
cousin or -- to me if you’re going to prove who you are by
ture records -- now, people can be awful lazy too, hey, you
know, if you’ve got, say 400 in the family and there’s only
one person or two people doing all the work to get the
birth certificates and get everything that you need, and
fill out the applications and show that it is approved true
lineage, who’s the government to say that it’s wrong? If
these are stamped true copies, you know. These true copies
is what’s being kept in the government departments. I
mean, you can’t defraud a true copy.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M’hm.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Can you? Do you think?

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I hope -- I

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: So who’s to say that,

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: You know.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M’hm.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: I mean, if it’s a true

copy, it’s a true copy.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M’hm.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: So who’s to say that,

you know, like -- I mean, if I’ve got my third great

grandmother and this is her name, but we have no record of
her showing up anywhere, but you know because you have proof that Mary was here, then all of a sudden -- and you know who Mary married because that’s your line, all of a sudden Mary’s over here and Mary’s married to someone totally different. Oh, come on.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Yeah. Yeah. I’ve heard from other women that talked about how these, you know, status and non-status, these labels create a lot of division, even within a family, within a community. Have you experienced that? Do -- do you want to speak about that at all?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Me personally, my family?

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Or the division you see, do you see this causing division within families and communities, this status, non-status, what points you have, what points you don’t have?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Well, you’re better off not asking anyone, you know. Like, nothing sounds any worse than someone saying, I’m a carded member.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M’hm.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: You know. Carded member? What’s a carded member? You know, I can’t -- you know, like, I’m status, yes, I’m status Indian till the 31st of March, but the point of -- you can’t brag about it.
You can’t really talk about it, not unless you want to. You’re an individual. You want to be proud and say, I have the status card. You know, I’ve -- I’ve got my letter saying I’m Indian, you know.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: M’hm.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: I hope the government, by the 31st of March, sends me a letter and says, Take that picture done at that -- certificate off your wall because you’re not Indian, hey. To me, I did a lot of writing -- reading on it and apparently there was one or two cases back in 1984 where they revoked so many First Nations cards, not too many, but you’re talking -- well, there’s 10,512 from what I can gather that are -- maybe 150 off that, that are, as of the end of March, we are no longer, you know.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Counsel, are you aware of any of those cases? Okay. We’ll dig.

I don't think I have any other questions. I really want to thank you for coming and sharing. I had some questions about the impact of -- with the term aging out, and Meredith, you covered those, so thank you.

So I don't have any more questions, but if there’s anything you want to say before we finish?

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: I want to say thank you. I feel an awful lot better. I could just break my heart
now. I don't want anyone not to like me or, you know, to hate me or -- for being honest. I just want people to realize that we’ve all got our own journey. Have some respect, don’t talk about us, don’t put us down. Even our own fellow sisters and brothers who have a tendency to do the gossip thing, you know. Stop it. Stop, you know. If you can’t do something good for me, don’t do nothing. Don’t come in my space, cause I’m telling you, this is what keeps me going, my stones, and no negativity is coming into my body, you know. And if I’m going to cry, I cry alone because I find -- you know, my kids say, Mom, you’re getting cold. I say, No, I’m not getting cold, but it’s strange when you say, well, people wonder, what is your purpose in life? Wow, my purpose in life now is to show whoever wants to hear from me that I’m Mi’kmaw or Mi’kmaq, you know, right?

I said to my granddaughter a couple of months ago, I was -- they always -- well, even my own daughter used to -- daughters used to say, Mom, you’re like a rap singer. This was years ago, hey, and you know, like, I can’t sing, but anyway, I was saying to her a couple months ago, I said, Lauren (ph), I said, you know, like there’s red and yellow, black and white. And she said, Nan, that’s the pictures of the medicine wheel, and I said, yeah, but I said, listen to this one. All are precious in
his sight, the Creator, hey? And it’s true, you know.

I learned that song a long time ago, and we
are all precious, you know.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: Absolutely.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: And I -- I want to thank
Tanya and Jade and Meredith, and my friend Margaret, and I
want to thank Amelia for the -- I think we got a little bit
of a friendship back there. Okay. You know, when you lose
a friendship it breaks your heart, you know, and -- cause
sometimes you want to be able to help that friendship too
by, you know, like, going back to the bullying again. You
know, like, the people that think they’ve got a higher --
no one’s in a hierarchy.

Like a situation where, Oh, I’m better than
you, you do that, you know. Like I say to my kids all the
time, I don’t want to brag about you, I’m not a bragger,
you know, like, cause you get those parents that, My Johnny
will never do that. My Mary wouldn’t go there, you know,
but no one knows what your children are going to do.
Right? And when the day comes that they do do it, okay,
you’re a parent you got -- when you become a parent, it’s a
life sentence. It really is, except for my mother didn’t
take it as a life sentence, but, you know.

She’s dead and gone now five years. Poor
thing died of brain cancer, but, you know -- and I always
told her that I would tell my story one of these days. So I think she’s looking down and she’s pretty proud of me now, and my Nan. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER QAJAQ ROBINSON: I have some gifts for you.

MS. SYLVIA MURPHY: Oh, my goodness.

MS. MEREDITH PORTER: And with that we will adjourn the hearing.

--- Upon adjourning at 12:58 p.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Elaine Kokoski, 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.

Elaine Kokoski
March 24, 2018