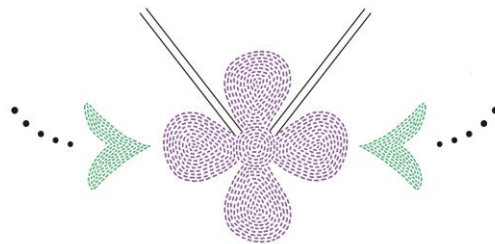


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale
sur les femmes et les filles
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Public Hearings
Riverlodge Place
Thompson, Manitoba**



PUBLIC

Wednesday March 21, 2018

Public Volume 76

**Janet Lowther & Helen Bignell,
In Relation to Amanda Sofia Bartlett**

**Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette
Commission Counsel: Christa Big Canoe**

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APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations	Stuart Wuttke (Legal Counsel) Julie McGregor (Legal Counsel)
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs	Non-appearance
Government of Canada	Lucy Bell (Legal Counsel)
Government of Manitoba	Samuel Thomson (Legal Counsel)
Manitoba Moon Voices Inc.	Non-appearance
MMIWG Coalition (Manitoba)	Non-appearance
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada & Manitoba Inuit Association	Non-appearance
Winnipeg Police Service	Non-appearance
Women of the Metis Nation	Non-appearance

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Commissioner: Michèle Audette

Commission Counsel: Christa Big Canoe

Order: Redact the names of any third parties in Exhibit
4 (Salvation Army fax)

Grandmothers, Elders, Knowledge-keepers: Darlene Osborne
(National Family Advisory Circle), Thelma Morrissette, Agnes
Spence, Audrey Siegl, Bernie Poitras Williams, Isabelle Morris,
Andy Daniels, Ovide Caribou, Florence Catcheway

Clerk: Maryiam Khoury

Registrar: Bryan Zandberg

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1	Folder of two digital images displayed during the public testimony of the family. [P01P14P0202_Lowther_Bignell_(Bartlett)_Exh_1]	75
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Thompson, Manitoba

--- Upon commencing on Wednesday, March 21, 2018 at 12:36
p.m.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Good afternoon,
Commissioner Audette. I just -- before we actually get
started, and I have an opportunity to introduce the next
family to you, I just wanted to let you know that the --
the plan is that we're going to start their testimony, and
then we will take a lunch break and continue their
testimony after lunch. So it's a pleasure to introduce you
to the next family. Beside me, I have Janet Lowther, and
her mother, Helen Flett (phonetic) Bignell. Janet and
Helen will be sharing the story of their sister and
daughter, Amanda Bartlett. And before we begin -- sure.
Sorry, if we could just get everyone's attention for a
minute. We're trying to start the next hearing. Sorry.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: *Merci Maître
Big Canoe.*

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: So I will just do
the introduction again, if that's all right. I just wanted
to introduce Janet Lowther, and her mother, Helen Flett
Bignell. Janet and Helen will be sharing the story of
their sister and daughter, Amanda Bartlett. Before we
actually have Amanda [sic] -- pardon, before we have the --
the family share about Amanda, I would ask that they be

1 promised in. Can you take the microphone for a minute?

2 (Indiscernible).

3 **MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG:** So good afternoon.

4 It's Helen? Hi, Helen.

5 **HELEN BIGNELL, Affirmed:**

6 **MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG:** Okay. Thank you. And
7 I'll promise in Janet right now as well.

8 **JANET LOWTHER, Affirmed:**

9 **MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG:** Okay. Thank you.

10 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** (Indiscernible)

11 she's going to talk into the microphone, but -- so if
12 you -- so bring the microphone up when you're talking.

13 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Oh.

14 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. It's okay.

15 So I'm going to offer that either of you actually have the
16 opportunity to begin, but I understand the place that you
17 want to begin sharing with the Commissioner is to tell us a
18 little bit about the strengths, of Amanda's strengths, or
19 share some fond memories.

20 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** I think I'm

21 (indiscernible). My name is Janet Lowther. My sister is
22 Amanda Sofia Bartlett. She's three years older than I am.
23 She went missing from Winnipeg, I believe, when she was
24 around 17 years-old. And it's been just about 22 years,
25 and I -- I can't remember her voice. I don't remember how

1 she sounds. But I can remember her characteristics. She
2 was so imaginative. She would read. She loved to read.
3 She'd read all the time. She'd write stories, and all
4 kinds of different stories. And she'd read them to me.
5 Like -- and like, the stories she would make up were just
6 amazing. And to this day, I still, kind of, think, you
7 know, like, I -- I often reflect back on that, especially
8 when I'm travelling, and you see the hills on the side of
9 the roads. And she used to tell me, oh, those are dinosaur
10 eggs in there, they're waiting to hatch, Janet. One of
11 these days, they're going to get you. But, yeah, she
12 always scared me like that.

13 And we spent a lot of time together. She
14 babysat me a lot. And especially when mom would go to
15 bingo. And she'd have to put me to bed, or -- and we'd go
16 to bed, and we'd be laying there, and she'd start scaring
17 me with her stories. And the one thing she did was she
18 would flip her eyelids over, and she'd start talking in a
19 different voice, and she'd be like, "I'm not Amanda no
20 more. I'm a demon. I took over Amanda's body." And I'd
21 be like, "Amanda, stop it. Stop it, Mandy (phonetic),
22 you're scaring me. I know that's you." "No. Amanda's
23 gone." And she'd change her voice, and then I'd pull
24 myself underneath the blankets. I'd be like, "Mandy, stop
25 it. I will tell mom when she gets home." And then, no,

1 she wouldn't stop. And then she'd start, like, convulsing
2 on the bed. And, you know, doing all kinds of crazy
3 things. But, yeah, she scared me a lot with her stories.

4 And she was so imaginative. She used to
5 take me out and introduce me to all her friends. And
6 Amanda was very accepting. She would -- never really hung
7 around with a cool crowd or anything like that. She always
8 seemed to be drawn to the misfits and to the -- to the odd
9 balls, you know, like -- because that's where she felt like
10 she fit in.

11 And she was a good friend. She was -- she
12 was a very good friend to a lot of girls. And I found that
13 got her into trouble sometimes because she was too
14 trusting. And -- and it made her vulnerable to get, you
15 know, back-stabbed or two-faced by her friends. So we
16 always had people constantly trying to fight with her
17 because of just how out there she was. And so -- such a
18 good person in general.

19 She really enjoyed outside. Just -- she was
20 just so -- she was just a all around good person.
21 Everybody loved her in the family. She was the favourite
22 auntie, which kind of got me jealous because, like, I
23 absolutely love my nieces and nephews, but you can't
24 compete with someone like that, especially Amanda. And the
25 way she was with children was just amazing. And children

1 were just drawn to her. It's just how she was. I don't
2 know.

3 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** (Indiscernible) your
4 mom?

5 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Pardon?

6 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Does your mom want
7 to (indiscernible)?

8 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Do you want to share
9 anything more than that?

10 **MS. HELEN BIGNELL:** M'hm.

11 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. Just hold the
12 microphone a little high.

13 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Okay. That's good.

14 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** (Indiscernible).

15 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Just --

16 **MS. HELEN BIGNELL:** Hi, my name is Helen,
17 and I'm the mother of Amanda -- Amanda Bartlett. And
18 bringing up Amanda was -- when she was small, well, when
19 she was born, she was such a quiet little girl. Very
20 quiet. And then, like, and she started growing up, and
21 then started being friends with Janet, and -- and she was a
22 very good, bubbly person, and very friendly with other
23 people. I always taught my kids to try to be friendly with
24 people. And to be kind to other people. And then, like,
25 Amanda too, like, she was -- she like to read and tell us

1 funny jokes, and she'd do crazy things, and -- just to make
2 us laugh.

3 And then -- and -- and I ended up having
4 some problems. And then -- then somewhere along the line,
5 that we ended up getting lost. We got lost. And then she,
6 like, after Janet left, I think that's when things, sort
7 of, went to -- everywhere, right mixed up. And just the
8 fighting continuing on with battles with her dad, and then
9 him using her as a pawn, and it just made me feel like --
10 at times, it was -- it seemed like he was using her. And
11 it just seemed like I was losing a -- a battle I couldn't
12 win. So -- and I felt, maybe, that had affect Amanda. And
13 then -- and then Amanda started to, what you call it? Kind
14 of, started retal (phonetic) -- I don't know how to say
15 that word, retaliating.

16 And then -- and she started hanging around
17 with friends that weren't the kind of people that she
18 shouldn't have been hanging around with. But I couldn't
19 tell Amanda anything. I tried to. There were times when
20 she would go and then wouldn't come home. And then I had
21 to get the cops to look after her -- get after her, and --
22 and then me and her siblings would go looking for her.
23 We'd walk the streets. And Saskatoon was pretty big, and
24 we didn't even know where to start to look for her.

25 So anyways, and I thought, "Well, she'd come

1 back." And she'd come home. And she'd dress up, bathe
2 herself, and then -- and then out she'd go. And I'd ask
3 her, "You going to come home after school?" And she'd say,
4 "Yes." And she wouldn't come home after school, she'd be
5 gone again, just continued on.

6 So finally, I -- what you call her? I
7 thought, "Well, I'll leave Saskatoon. Maybe that will
8 just, kind of, what you call? Help her to get off the
9 streets. So I moved to The Pas, and then there again, she
10 ended up meeting people again, the same kind of people.
11 Kids that -- that just were free to come and go. And
12 again, I had to do the same thing over again, and look for
13 her.

14 And then -- and then finally, I, you know,
15 we sat down, and we talked together, and I asked her, I
16 said, "Amanda, what are we going to do? What am I going to
17 do to help you to -- to make you happy and just stop?" I
18 said, you know, I said, "It's scary out there. There's bad
19 people out there." So I asked her, I said, "Do you want to
20 go for some counselling?" So I sent her to this provincial
21 building in The Pas to get some counselling for herself.
22 And then the next day, she came back and then she said,
23 "Well, Mom," she says, "I'm going to go to Winnipeg." She
24 said, "They said I can go to school there." So I said,
25 "Well," I said, "You're 17 years-old now." I said, "What -

1 --" I says, "I have no control over you." I said, "You
2 don't want to listen to me." I said, I -- I said, "If you
3 think this is what you want." I said, "If it's going to
4 help." I said, "Well, you can go." And it -- and then I
5 says, "As long as I know that --" I said, "that you're
6 going to be going to school."

7 So anyways, and then, she left. And this
8 was through the provincial building with CFS. And then --
9 and she -- then -- then when she left, she phoned me from
10 Portage la Prairie, she called me collect. And that was
11 the last time I got to talk to her. The last time. And
12 then I got a letter, I don't know, about maybe -- about a
13 month ago, two months ago after, and then -- saying that
14 she had left the -- the shelter. And this time -- by this
15 time, I thought, she was supposed to be in the school. I
16 didn't even know that she was supposed to -- that they had
17 put her in that shelter. I didn't even know what that was
18 all about, being in there. Was she supposed to wait there
19 'til she goes to -- to be put into school? No, it didn't
20 happen that way. And apparently, I guess, when they wrote
21 me that letter, they said that she had left. And this was
22 awhile ago after.

23 So anyways, so I -- I waited for her. And I
24 thought, "Well, she was always managed -- she's always get
25 a hold of one of the family to let us know where she was,

1 or one of her siblings to know." And then I knew she was
2 okay. I remember when she was in Winnipeg, she'd do the
3 same thing with my -- my siblings there. And then she went
4 to my brother's place and she stayed there and went and
5 washed up herself. And then -- and then after that, my
6 brother said that she was welcome to stay at her place.
7 But she never came back. And then -- and we've -- I've
8 never heard from her ever since. And we thought, "Maybe,
9 well Amanda is Amanda. Maybe we'll give it time for her
10 to -- to come back."

11 And now it's been what? Going on 22 years,
12 and I haven't even heard from her. And to this day, I
13 don't even know whether she's gone, or is she still here?
14 I've seen a medicine man, I've seen a medium, trying to get
15 help for (indiscernible) locating my girl. But I never got
16 any answers from anybody.

17 And then to lose Amanda, I -- I felt so
18 lost. I think I lost myself after I lost her. And my life
19 for me hasn't really felt -- been the same. I think about
20 her everyday. I blame myself. Why did I let her go? But
21 Amanda was so set in her own ways. I couldn't if I wanted
22 to. And I was -- I was helpless. And I just kept carrying
23 that guilt all the time. And then I -- I just got so -- I
24 felt so -- anger -- angry. And then I felt so remorse.
25 And I felt resentment. I didn't even like myself. And I

1 just -- I just felt like I -- I lost -- I lost myself. And
2 I still feel like that today. And I don't know sometimes
3 how I -- I cope with it. Sometimes I end up -- I just -- I
4 think stupid. And I -- I just don't even know where to
5 begin anymore. I just feel so lost losing her. I never
6 thought I would lose one of my children.

7 But a part of me are lost myself. I can't
8 even cope sometimes during the day without trying to think
9 about her because you hear it in the news everyday. How is
10 one supposed to forget? When you hear another child is
11 gone. When is it going to stop? I just -- I just feel a
12 lot -- a lot of pain.

13 And I just -- and then I find it that I --
14 that, you know, when I went to go -- reported her missing,
15 they told me I couldn't report her missing because she
16 wasn't missing from The Pas. So I -- Janet was going to
17 Winnipeg. I got Janet to do it for me. And this is all we
18 got was just nothing but remarks from -- from the RCMP.
19 Got remarks from other people. Wasting other people's tax
20 money. We never asked nothing from anybody. We did it all
21 on our own. We never asked anything from anybody.

22 And we had -- and now we, what you call?
23 We talk -- I talked to my -- my grandchildren about me
24 watch -- to watch out when they go someplace. And to watch
25 who the -- who they hang around with. All we -- don't

1 sleep at where there's parties. Come home. I kink
2 (phonetic) -- I think I -- the same thing with me, I think
3 it was the same way as being brought up that way. When in
4 an alcoholic environment -- and I did my life that way too
5 because no body ever taught me. So I, kind of, more or
6 less, kind of, got it taught from other people. I put
7 myself in church to try to get help there.

8 And even that, that was the happiest time in
9 my -- my life, when I did turn my life around. But then I
10 got criticized for it, for trying to change my -- to try to
11 change my life. And I just gave up. And I never stopped
12 ever since. It's not the booze anymore. Now, it's the
13 pills. It helps me to sleep, and to not think all the
14 time. I hate thinking because I -- I think about my
15 daughter. Where is she?

16 We searched for her. I don't even know what
17 a human bone even looks like. What am I searching for?
18 And I don't know, I just -- the only person that I --
19 really, really helped me through this was Janet. She was
20 the only one that really stuck close by me and helped me
21 through this. But I -- I'm really trying to turn -- trying
22 to turn my life around. But it's so hard to do it because
23 I think too much. I'm even surprised that I'm not even on
24 the fourth floor because of the things that I think goes --
25 that goes through my head. But I still -- I still pray for

1 my daughter. And I still have hope. I'm just hoping that
2 somebody will know something, where she is, or -- or
3 she's -- something. I don't know what I'm hoping for, but
4 I'm hoping.

5 And I -- I just don't know how sometimes to
6 deal with it. I cry in my room. I go by myself somewhere,
7 I pray, and then I get angry at God. I get so angry at
8 everybody. I just feel like as if I'm not a -- I feel like
9 I don't have any feelings anymore. I just feel like, sort
10 of, like I -- I died inside, me. Because I just -- like I
11 said, just having to live with that guilt for Amanda. And
12 I don't know what else to say. And thank you for
13 listening.

14 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Thank you, Helen. I
15 know it wasn't easy to share particularly a lot of, like,
16 what you're feeling, and what you're experiencing. What we
17 would like to ask to do, is to have the half hour lunch
18 break. And after lunch, a number of things that Helen has
19 actually described, we would like to unpack a little
20 further, and provide some documentation on. So at this
21 point, I would kindly request a half hour lunch break.
22 Only 30 minutes, please, so that the family has the
23 opportunity to come back and share the rest of their story.
24 So at this time, if we could take 30 minutes and be back
25 here at 1:30, that would be very helpful. Thank you.

1 (LUNCH BREAK)

2 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. Good
3 afternoon, Commissioner Audette. We would like to come
4 back to the hearing that we began just before lunch. We
5 have Janet and Helen sharing the story of Amanda. Right
6 before the break, Helen had actually shared a lot. She had
7 covered a large timeframe because Amanda has been missing
8 for some time. What we would like to do is, the family
9 would like to have the opportunity to, kind of, unpack some
10 of that story, so that the Commission understands the steps
11 and processes they took in looking for Amanda, or trying to
12 find out what happened with her. So I'm going to start
13 with Janet, and ask her some questions about -- we heard
14 Helen say that once Amanda went down to Winnipeg, Amanda
15 had gone down to Winnipeg, so I want you to maybe pick up
16 from there if you could, Janet? About how you guys started
17 to try to find out, you know, what -- where did Amanda go,
18 or what was happening --

19 MS. JANET LOWTHER: Okay.

20 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: -- with Amanda?

21 MS. JANET LOWTHER: Maybe I'll go back a
22 little bit further than that.

23 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Please.

24 MS. JANET LOWTHER: We come from a blended
25 family. My sister and I, we don't share the same fathers.

1 We share the same mom, but different fathers. And during
2 that time, kind of, things didn't go well between the
3 marriage between my mom and my late father. And my -- my
4 father, he used me a lot to get to my mom. And he also
5 used Amanda too. So we really got split at that point when
6 my dad up and took me to New Brunswick where I was raised
7 by my dad. And I haven't seen my family in -- for years.
8 I was taken from my sisters and my brother, and my mom.
9 Wasn't allowed to have contact with them, even though my
10 mom did nothing wrong.

11 So when I -- when I came back from New
12 Brunswick, I came searching for my family. And I found
13 everybody, except for Amanda. She was just -- couldn't
14 find her. So I thought, you know, well, when you're in
15 trouble, where do you go? You go to the police. You go to
16 the RCMP because they're there to serve and protect. Well,
17 in this case, it doesn't work that way.

18 When I went looking for Amanda, I started
19 off, I think this was, oh, I can't even remember. My
20 daughter, she's 17 now, and she was going through a liver
21 transplant as a baby. I think she was about one. And at
22 that time, I actually went physically to Winnipeg and I
23 made a report. I don't know what ever happened to that,
24 and the -- they were claiming that that never happened.
25 And it did happened. It -- it happened. I was underage at

1 They -- they did, I don't know if that was their best, but
2 they gave me options of, "Oh, well, did you try this? You
3 know, the Friendship Centres, or did you try looking in the
4 homeless shelters?" Or -- at that point they, I think, it
5 was the RCMP that looked into -- to see if Amanda had,
6 maybe, lost her memory, or she was in the hospital or
7 something. And there was nothing there that matched her at
8 all, anything, there was no sign of her. There was no
9 medical records they told me. And -- but, yet, she still
10 wasn't deemed as a missing person at that point.

11 So all I was trying to do was get her
12 classified as -- as missing. Just to get our foot in the
13 door, and then from there, maybe, they can teach me how to
14 find her, or put her on the news or, you know, maybe
15 something, anything. Just anything to help us find where
16 she could be because she could be anywhere. She was such
17 a -- just -- she just went and did, that's how she was.

18 And then I got slapped in face. One cop in
19 Winnipeg, he says, "Ahh, Janet, I'm sorry. You know, we
20 don't do family reunions here." I was like, "All right.
21 That's fine. You know, I'll -- I'll take that." And then
22 another cop, "Oh, Janet, six years went by. Why are you
23 even bothering? Why now? Why?" Well, it wouldn't have
24 been six years, it would have been two years less if you
25 guys took me seriously in the first place. Whatever.

1 I got to this point where I was just, "Okay.
2 I'll do things on my own." I sit home, sit on my computer,
3 emailing her picture. I made my own little missing persons
4 poster. So I started sending it off to homeless shelters,
5 bus depots, airports, anything, anywhere, different towns,
6 make my way around. I don't even know if -- God only knows
7 how many emails and phone calls I made just to ask people,
8 "Can you put her poster up in case she came this way?" And
9 remind you at this point, she'll still not labelled as
10 missing.

11 So one day I was at home, and I was sitting
12 with my -- with my ex watching T.V., and we watched this
13 episode called Stolen Sisters on T.V. And it was basically
14 about a couple of girls who've gone missing. And at the
15 end there was a number to Amnesty International to call.
16 So I gave them a call, and I -- I explained to them, I was
17 like, "I -- I don't - I don't know what to do. I'm like --
18 I'm exhausting all my options. Where do I go? What do I
19 do?" And they said, "Well, we just finished up our -- our
20 campaign there in -- in Canada, so we've moved on. But we
21 will give you some numbers."

22 And -- and yet I followed through. And I
23 got through to Child Protection, I think that was based out
24 of Ontario. And this was my third slap in the face I got
25 from the police -- from the government. It took me two

1 solid years to fight to get my sister labelled as missing,
2 to get help. But did they take a statement from me or my
3 mom? No, they didn't. They took the statement from the
4 lady from Child Protection that day. Like, so what -- what
5 does that mean? Why? Why -- why was my word and my mom's
6 word not good enough? Why did they have to make us wait so
7 long? Why did they bounce us around, and bounce us around,
8 and bounce us around? Like, there was so many cops I spoke
9 too, so many different investigators. She went into the
10 cold case files, she went into everything. But, yet, I've
11 never really got to know anyone personally who would sit
12 down and talk with me and tell me what's happening with my
13 sister's case.

14 So as - as these years have passed, and the
15 way I've been treated, and the things that were said to me
16 by -- by the police, I got frustrated. And anybody who
17 knows me as a -- on a personal level, I'm probably one of
18 the most humble people you would meet. It takes a lot to
19 get me angry. It takes a lot to get me upset. Most of the
20 time, I just, kind of, like, just laugh it off. You know,
21 it is what it is, move on. But this -- this sticks in my
22 heart negatively. I'm -- I'm very frustrated. I'm -- I --
23 I have frustrations like you don't even know.

24 Like, you know, when you teach your kids, I
25 have four daughters at home, my oldest is 20, from 17 to 13

1 to 9, all the daughters, all girls. Now, I have to sit at
2 home and I have to teach my girls, as you can see, they're
3 all right there. And I have to sit there and tell them
4 that in the eyes of society, in Canadian society, we're not
5 valued as much as the other race. I have to tell them
6 that. I'm not going to sugar-coat it because that's how I
7 protect them. And it's a proven fact, and I've seen it.
8 It's a fact. Right there. As we're not as good as
9 everyone else because of the colour of our skin, because of
10 where we came from.

11 I get a lot of jealousy and anger. For
12 example, when Krull went missing from Winnipeg, they had
13 helicopters, they had businesses putting up rewards, they
14 had people looking. But, yet, what about my sisters? All
15 my Aboriginal sisters that went missing. Why don't we get
16 the same treatment? Where are the helicopters for these
17 little girls? Why aren't businesses putting up rewards for
18 these people? What makes it different between Krull and
19 Amanda? Tina Fontaine? All the girls that are missing.
20 Why did Krull get better treatment? Why? And then explain
21 that to my girls.

22 I'm so frustrated, I'm so angry. I've lost
23 faith. I got to this point where when Amanda went missing
24 after 20 years -- she went missing, I tattooed her on me,
25 so we'd grow old together. And I decided I'm not going to

1 look no more. Why? Why look?

2 There's nobody there to help. I was given
3 false promises on my ground searches. I was expecting,
4 maybe, a hundred people when we first started looking, we
5 had five people show up. Even MKO promised to come by,
6 they didn't show up. Neither did the police. It was just
7 strangers. Strangers and -- that we had no idea, that just
8 showed up. And they helped, and we kind of developed a
9 friendship to the point where it's almost like a family. A
10 sad way to build a family because we all have someone who's
11 missing, and we just decided -- we gave up on the police.
12 We gave up on the government. We'll do it on our own, do
13 what we can. Even though, we don't know what we're doing.
14 Try and maintain our own families, our jobs, in between all
15 this. And -- and we're not rich people. We're not rich
16 folks, we're just average people. We can't afford to
17 travel all the time, so we do what we can when we can.

18 And then when I -- when I talk to my
19 daughters about it, like I said, I don't sugar-coat
20 anything. So I decided to continue on taking things into
21 my own hands. And I will continue on. My daughters are
22 very popular. They have many friends, lots of friends.
23 And, like, I have kids constantly coming and going from my
24 home. And for example, on really hot days, I set up a
25 little slip-and-slide party in my front yard. We have a

1 sprinkler going, a little pool, and you know, we put a big
2 piece of poly, so the kids can slide back and forth. And
3 we usually -- we have a gathering of about, maybe, about 20
4 kids ranging from six to thirteen, around those age. And
5 majority of them are girls.

6 And then we take a break. I'll make a big
7 bowl of popcorn, and bring out some juice boxes, and
8 they'll sit around. And, I think, this is my opportunity.
9 And this is where I'm going to make things be different, a
10 little bit. At least if it can just start a ripple effect,
11 and maybe -- so what I do is I sit down with the kids, and
12 we're talking where we sit -- when we're having snack, our
13 popcorn. And I'll sit on the stoop and they'll be all on
14 the yard, and I'll tell them, "You guys know I have a
15 sister?" I'll say, "I have a big sister. She's really
16 cool, you know. If she was here, she'd probably be sliding
17 with you guys. You'd be blowing bubbles, and probably
18 making this way more fun than it is now because that's just
19 the type of person that she is." And then they ask me,
20 "Well, where is she?" And I tell her, "You know, Amanda
21 was stolen from us. Amanda went to Winnipeg, and someone
22 took her away."

23 And then that's when I go and I start to
24 discuss, you know, like, "She was -- she was a good girl."
25 I tell them exactly how she was, the things she did. How

1 we fought, you know, like, siblings. And the way my
2 daughters fight, you know.

3 And I -- I tell those little girls about
4 personal safety, is one thing we talk about. And I tell
5 them, "You know, what got Amanda was that she was so
6 caring, and so nice, anybody who loved her, or wanted to
7 love her, or show her love, she was right there. She was
8 right in there like a dirty shirt. It didn't matter what
9 you did in your past, or who you were, or anything. As
10 long as you were a good person, you showed love, Amanda
11 loved you back." And I said, "And that's what got her."

12 So I turn to the kids, and I tell them, "I'd
13 like to tell you guys something. Bad guys -- even bad guys
14 are out there. There not going to come at you dressed in
15 black like a ninja, like you see on T.V. They're not --
16 they're not going to be dressed like gangsters, or have
17 tattoos, or they're not going to show up in a big black
18 van." I said, "They're going to be someone you trust. See
19 these bad guys, they're wolves, but they're disguised as
20 sheep." I tell them that.

21 And -- and it's -- you -- you know how
22 difficult it is to get a -- a group of 25 kids to be quiet
23 and to listen? Well, at this point, all these kids are
24 sitting there quietly, all of them. And all their eyes are
25 me, and I could just -- I can literally see on their faces,

1 that they're absorbing everything that I'm saying. It's --
2 it's going. It's hitting them in the brain, it's hitting
3 in the heart, and this is something they're going to
4 remember forever.

5 So I tell them, I go on, I tell them, "Okay.
6 This is -- you know, the wolves disguised as sheep?
7 They'll come along, and they'll say, 'I want to help you. I
8 want to be your friend. You're such a pretty girl. Now,
9 let's come with me. Let's go. I'll take you someplace,
10 and it'll be better.'" I said, "That's how things like
11 that happen." I said, "You have to watch for those wolves
12 that are disguised as sheep. You always have to watch your
13 back." And I tell the little girls, and the little
14 children, I was like, "You know, you don't have to be
15 related to look out for each other." I said, "Our race
16 makes us a family. We're related one way or another. The
17 Creator made us. So we look out for each other. Even if
18 you guys don't like each other, you look out for each
19 other."

20 I go on to tell them about stranger danger.
21 "You know, we have strange vehicles come into our
22 community. You know, like, watch for that. Or if you see
23 one of your friends getting into a vehicle with someone,
24 make sure you pay attention to detail. Pay attention to
25 the kind of vehicle it is, the colour, try and look at

1 who's driving. If -- even a licence plate if you can
2 remember." I was like, "But, you know, if you look at, and
3 you remember those minor details, you could save somebody.
4 You could save your friend, or your cousin, or your sister,
5 or -- or anybody." I was like, "You got to watch out for
6 each other. That's what we do. And then if we do that,
7 then less of my -- of our sisters are going to go missing.
8 If we look out for each other, and we love each other, and
9 we be kind. You don't have to be related." I constantly
10 tell them that.

11 And -- and then they sit there, and they --
12 they listen, which surprises me because, like I said,
13 majority of the kids don't. Especially on free time, when
14 they're not -- necessarily have to learn anything, but they
15 choose -- they chose it. They -- they ask me questions
16 about Amanda all the time. And now, I have kids come
17 running to my door telling me, "There's a grey car parked
18 down the street there. And it's been there for awhile. I
19 don't know who that person is. And he has a cellphone. I
20 think he's taking my picture." Okay. Right then and there
21 I realized, okay. Good. This is making an effect.
22 It's -- it's being a positive effect on my own community.

23 And then right then and there I realized, we
24 don't have to wait for the government. We don't have to
25 wait for this Inquiry, we don't have to wait for the

1 police, we don't have to wait for the RCMP. We can make
2 differences starting at home. From my -- from my doorstep.
3 You know, I don't have the best home in the world. You
4 know, but right there in my doorstep, I started something.
5 And now, those little kids run home, and I have parents
6 come up and tell me, "Janet, I didn't know you had a
7 missing sister." So the ripple affect went on a little bit
8 more. And then I go on to tell them. And now, it's adults
9 listening. And then it ripple affect more, and more, and
10 more.

11 Now, just because I -- I spoke about that, I
12 feel like in different aspects, that can be used as well.
13 For example, I feel like you could -- everybody, or anybody
14 who has a missing loved one, don't ever stop talking.
15 Don't. Don't wait for the government. Don't wait for the
16 police. Talk, and talk, and talk, and don't stop talking.
17 Because that's what is going to teach our children. That's
18 what's going to prevent this. It's prevention. And we're
19 going to start at home. And start by talking to your
20 cousins, and talk to your nieces, your nephews, aunties,
21 uncles, friends. Talk about it. Don't let your missing
22 loved one's name go in vain. Don't -- don't let them just
23 disappear. Keep talking. And make sure those names make a
24 difference for our future generations of children.

25 Every day it's a heartache for me because my

1 oldest daughter, she's -- she's 20, and she's a spitting
2 image of Amanda. Right down to the dimples to the jet-
3 black hair. There she is up there. She looks exactly like
4 Amanda. And I see that. And it's a reminder of -- of
5 Mandy, and -- and how she was taken. And how we weren't
6 taken seriously in our own country, our own land. We're
7 not taken seriously at all. And that -- and that -- that's
8 sad. It's sad because who do you go to after the RCMP
9 don't want to help you? Who's there to help us since we're
10 not as good as everyone else? Where do we go? What do we
11 do? Take it into our own hands.

12 You know, a lot of our people, a lot of our
13 girls and boys, they don't -- they don't know. You know,
14 it's just -- they need to know. They need to learn.
15 And -- and then we can't sugar-coat it by putting little
16 stupid commercials with cartoons on there. No, that's not
17 how it's going to work. That's not how things are going to
18 sink into kids. We need someone to come into our schools,
19 at every single age level, starting at kindergarten.
20 Children need to learn boundaries. They need to learn the
21 difference between a good love and a bad love, or unhealthy
22 love and healthy love. They need to know that.

23 I went to a seminar once, and there was a
24 lot of women. And I talked about my suggestions of what I
25 want to see happen. And I had a lot of women in there, and

1 I asked them, I was like, "How many of you have been a
2 victim of abuse; sexual abuse, physical abuse, sexual
3 assault, anything, by anybody? In your whole life, how
4 many of you?" And I'd say about 90 percent of those women
5 braised (phonetic) their hands. So I said, "Okay. Keep
6 your hands up. Now, how many of you women reported it?"
7 There was four. Now, why wouldn't they report it? Because
8 they didn't know. Because they were scared. They had
9 fear. There was family members, or whatever. They didn't
10 want to go through with whatever. They were -- felt
11 ashamed of themselves. They had their reasons. But
12 majority of it was because they didn't know what to do.
13 They were scared to step forward. They were scared to tell
14 their stories, or whatever.

15 Now, this is continuing on. Now, if we were
16 to implement that into, like, let's say grade 5, 4, I bet
17 you anything that those people that left their hands up,
18 those hands would have been -- there would have been more
19 people who reported that, who reported that violence, who
20 reported of -- what happened. But it's just the fact that
21 they don't know. People learn more when they're young.
22 Things sink in more when you're younger. And -- and you
23 carry it with you. So let's implement that in our schools.
24 Let's teach that. Let -- let's show them what's legal,
25 what's not legal. Let them know that there's resources out

1 there. If you're scared, that there's people to talk to
2 about it. There's people to come forward and help you
3 through that situation, to get you out of that unhealthy
4 environment. That you are a loving person. You are
5 labelled, you're a person, a human being that does not
6 deserve that kind of treatment. Children need to know
7 that.

8 And then heading up into the more bigger
9 years, high school years. Relationships, boyfriend,
10 girlfriends. They need to learn a healthy love. They need
11 to know that you can be loved and give love without having
12 sex, without getting pregnant, without having to beat each
13 other up, or go beat up your other girlfriend, or your ex-
14 girlfriend. You know, relationships like that. They need
15 to be taught healthy relationships.

16 I, myself, I don't -- I didn't know. I
17 found myself in a 15-year relationship, where I was -- I
18 was physically abused. And it took me a really long time
19 to get out of it. And it wasn't like I just walked in
20 there and he started beating me up. No, it didn't go that
21 way. It started off with controlling. It started off with
22 making me feel bad about the decisions I made, about the
23 things I've done. And then it got to the point where I
24 don't even know what I like to eat anymore because he
25 picked it out for me. He did everything for me because if

1 I didn't do it, then I'd get beat up. I didn't know. Now,
2 if you were to take me back to 15 years ago, and you talked
3 to me about how relationships, and how domestic violence
4 starts, maybe I would have steered clear if I knew the
5 result -- the end result of that. I would have.

6 Now, maybe that's something we can implement
7 in our junior highs, or maybe in our high school. Not only
8 that, I feel like high school students need to learn
9 transition. You know, you -- you get your grade 12, then
10 what? A lot of students want to leave our community, and
11 they want to go to school in -- in the cities. They want
12 to travel, they want to further their education, which is a
13 good thing. It should be a good thing.

14 But for Rinelle Harper, it wasn't a good
15 thing. It was horrible. It was a horrible experience.
16 And then after that happened, I always think how, good God,
17 my daughter's graduating and she wants to move to Winnipeg.
18 That's scary. That is so scary. So maybe, in the grade
19 10, 11, 12, they should have something taught about the
20 transition. About the difference between city life, and
21 reserve life, or small communities. They need to know that
22 there's a big difference out there. That there are way
23 worse people out there, than there are at home. You know,
24 you can't just run to the neighbours and they'll let you
25 in. It's not like that in Winnipeg. It's not like that in

1 Saskatoon, any city, it's not like that. But they need to
2 know.

3 Our -- our children need to be educated,
4 this could be prevented. Deep down inside my heart, I
5 honestly don't think that this Inquiry is going to do
6 anything for my sister. It's not going to bring her home.
7 I lost faith. It's been over, what? Just about 22 years,
8 and she's --

9 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Indiscernible).

10 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Nothing. She's three
11 years older than me, and she doesn't even know she has
12 nieces and -- and nephews out there. She's missed out on
13 so much. You know, and I go, I -- like, I look back to
14 when I was a kid and when I was jealous of her. I was so
15 jealous of her. You know, I was always ratting on her and
16 telling on her. You know, I always wanted to get her in
17 trouble because, like, everybody loved her and not me.
18 Now, I think about it now that I'm all grown up, you know,
19 it was just -- I wish she was here. I wish my daughters
20 could experience the love that Amanda gave you. The type
21 of person she was, how funny she was, her character. So
22 it's not only Amanda that's missing out, it's my -- my
23 daughters that are missing out on Amanda.

24 And -- and my sisters, and their children.
25 They have to deal with that too, and cope with it. Our

1 family is so broken. In the past year, within -- it hasn't
2 even been a year, my mom has actually lost -- suffered a
3 loss, a great loss. She found -- she got a phone call one
4 day that her sister committed suicide last summer. A
5 couple weeks after that, we got another phone call that my
6 niece committed suicide. My mom lost a granddaughter right
7 after. And then right after that, my mom lost her best
8 friend, within months. So we do come from a very broken
9 family. We're -- we're broken inside.

10 I only -- I can't remember Amanda's voice.
11 I had a dream of her once. It was -- it was really nice.
12 I dreamt that I was in this hall, and it was so sunny. It
13 was bright. Everybody was wearing bright colours. I don't
14 think anyone was even wearing black, but there was windows
15 all around the hall. And there was tables lined up. And
16 then you -- you walk in and there's food, and you go
17 around, you introduce yourself. I don't know if it was a
18 wedding, or what was going on at that point. But I started
19 walking and I saw Amanda sitting there. It, kind of, just
20 threw me off-guard. I, kind of, looked at her, and I was,
21 like, "Mandy?" And she smiled at me. She never said
22 anything, but she was wearing white. And she didn't even
23 have a tattoo on her face.

24 And how I was brought up in -- in learning
25 God and learning the -- the Bible ways, is that when you're

1 in Heaven, you go back to your perfect natural state.
2 There's no tattoos, no scars, or anything. So I, kind of,
3 took that dream and I thought, "Okay. Amanda's in a good
4 place. She's with God, or with the Creator. She's in
5 Heaven." She was a child when she went missing, so that
6 automatically gave her her ticket into Heaven. So that,
7 kind of, put me at ease at little bit.

8 There -- there are so many things that I
9 don't want to miss out on. And another thing I'd like to
10 talk about is when I was actually looking for Amanda. When
11 I was making my phone calls. I had to -- it was almost
12 like playing a little game. You phone, you make your
13 calls, you get rejected. Okay, let's try a different
14 route. Let's put more emphasis on the fact that my sister
15 was a street person. They seemed to pay attention more to
16 that, than the fact that my sister was my sister. But they
17 seemed to pay attention to the more of the fact that my
18 sister was on the streets. So now, every time I talk about
19 my sister, or I'm talking to an investigator, or something,
20 I have to bring that up.

21 I have to talk about that. I just feel like
22 that's bringing my sister down, and not labelling as -- her
23 as a sister, or as a daughter, or a granddaughter, or
24 anything. But we're basically labelling her as a hooker, a
25 street walker, a druggie, and, yeah, they'll pay attention

1 to that.

2 A couple times, I actually had to phone --
3 you can't get mad, that's one thing you're not allowed to
4 do when you're looking for someone because they use that
5 against you. A reason to hang up on you, a reason to say
6 you're uncooperative, and let's not do this. So you can't
7 get mad. Even though, you get slapped in the face so many
8 times, you take it. And I've took it. And then it gets to
9 the point where, okay, they don't like my Indian accent,
10 now I'm going to phone and I'm going to sound like a white
11 man, or sound like a white woman. So I try my best to hide
12 the accent. And then, yeah, they listened.

13 So, yeah, it -- the -- everything is so
14 corrupt. It's corrupted. It's sickening. I learned my
15 place in society. I learned my place within the eyes of
16 the RCMP. I learned who I am in the eyes of the
17 government. And I am not an equal person. I'm an
18 Aboriginal woman, which in the eyes of society, in the eyes
19 of the government, the eyes of the RCMP, I'm not worth
20 looking for. I'm not worth finding. I'm not worth sending
21 a helicopter out to look for me. And I am definitely not
22 worth having businesses putting up rewards to look for me.
23 And it's not just me. It's all Aboriginal women. So,
24 yeah, I'm angry. I'm frustrated. And it's a fact.

25 And I am so damn sick and tired of the

1 government pillowing everything. And they do. I can make
2 this complaint and say what I have to say right now, and
3 then as soon as -- I'm going to walk out that door, on news
4 feed you're going to see all these (Speaking Native
5 Language) out there, and they're going to be justifying
6 everything. They will justify it -- the reason why they
7 didn't take my sister's case seriously. They're going to
8 justify why I'm not as good as other women -- as other
9 races. They'll pillow it because I've seen it. It's
10 there. But what can you do? What do you do? Because
11 everything is justified. Everything is hidden behind big
12 words and paper.

13 I'm not saying this to get attention. I'm
14 not saying this because I'm just going by little things I
15 know. I'm saying this because it's a fact. You know, one
16 thing I live by is empathy. I show empathy in every day
17 life, with every single given situation that's put in front
18 of me I use empathy. I put myself in your shoes and I ask
19 myself, "Okay. How would I feel if I was you? Why am --
20 why are you behaving that way? Okay. This may be why."
21 So I run through different scenarios in my head. You know,
22 and then I don't get angry. I don't. It makes me more
23 understanding. It makes me more caring. Puts me more on
24 someone else's level.

25 Now, maybe, if our government and our RCMP,

1 or Winnipeg Police Service, maybe, if they had a little bit
2 of empathy, then maybe they would -- they would know. I
3 have gone to many places. I've spoke -- I've spoke about
4 Amanda. I've talked about our cases. Where are my
5 sister's investigators? Where's the police, the people who
6 are supposed to be actively out there looking for these
7 women? Where are they? Shouldn't they be sitting here
8 listening to these families crying and pleaing (phonetic)
9 for help? But there's nobody there. They're never there.
10 Not -- not the investigators. They'll go and send their
11 whoever, but not the investigators.

12 You know, I've yet to sit down and have them
13 project the vote, sit and listen to my mom. To listen to
14 the impact that it's having on her. You know, they're not
15 in my home. And they don't see the lost look on my mom's
16 face. You know, we're sitting around having dinner, or
17 we're sitting around watching a movie, or just doing things
18 as a family, and my mom's there, but she's not. And you
19 can see it in her face. She's gone. Her mind is gone.
20 You know, they don't see that. They don't see the -- the
21 direct impact that's going on inside our homes. I -- I
22 never understood why they never showed to these things.
23 Like, I honestly think like -- like there's two empty
24 tables over there, how many investigators could be sitting
25 there listening to these?

1 I -- I really hope I'm not missing anything,
2 but -- but, yeah, I -- I -- I'm -- I'm speaking out of
3 frustration, not out of anger, but out of frustration. I'm
4 speaking out of facts, and what I know, and from what I
5 seen, and from what I experienced. And this is the honest
6 to God truth. This is what we went through. And this is
7 what we continue to go through. So I give up.

8 After this is all said and done, my mom and
9 I decided that we're going to have a ceremony and we're
10 going to put out -- Amanda to rest. Because we need to
11 move on with our lives. My mom needs to move on. And then
12 just have faith in the Lord that maybe someday when we do
13 move on into the spirit world, that, yes, we will see
14 Amanda again. And we'll find out what happened. And
15 that's the only way we're going to find out. But even
16 though, even after we lay her to rest, you know, that
17 thought in the back of our minds will always be there.

18 I find the hardest time of year is when the
19 first snow because I think my sister's in ditch or in a
20 field somewhere. I know those are just bones by now, but,
21 yeah, it must be cold. Little bit of snow covers her.
22 Pray to God she's not locked up in someone's barn, or in --
23 in someone's basement. But that's something that sits
24 there in my mind -- was -- and I know it does with my mom.
25 And it eats us alive not knowing. I wish we were given

1 closure, but now we won't know until we head onto the
2 spirit world. And then that's -- that's when we'll find
3 out, but until then, like, what do you do? How do you heal
4 from something like this? Or you don't.

5 You take the experience, and you use it to
6 the most positive way that you can. And that's teaching,
7 and that's talking. That's teaching our younger
8 generations and -- and telling them, try and make
9 prevention and -- see that part, I don't like talking
10 about. I try so hard not to cry. But when it comes down
11 to it, and just knowing she's out there somewhere and
12 that's the part that hurts the most. I just don't want to
13 see this happen to anybody else. I don't want any other
14 families going through this. Because we need to change.

15 We need change in our communities. We need
16 change and we need to help ourselves because we can't rely
17 on the government. I swear to God people, we need to make
18 a difference for our future generations, for my daughters
19 because they're coming up into an age where they're going
20 to be going out on their own eventually. You know, I can't
21 keep them at home forever. But we do. We do need to start
22 making that change at home. Don't wait for the government.
23 I'm pleading, I'm begging you guys. Anybody who's missing
24 someone, someone who lost someone, talk about it. Prevent
25 it. Prevention. Don't let that name be forgotten. Start

1 making the change from your doorstep or from schools. Tell
2 your stories, tell their stories, and don't stop. Every
3 opportunity you have, tell it.

4 And tell it like it is, don't sugar-coat
5 anything. Because that's what -- that -- that's -- we'll
6 leave that for the government to do. They can sugar-coat
7 things, but we won't. Because, like, we don't have history
8 books, we carry down knowledge, and we hand down knowledge,
9 and that's how our people are. And that's how it's
10 supposed to be, and let's continue that. Bring it back.
11 Keep our kids safe.

12 You know, I just -- I feel for my mom. I
13 feel for her so bad because if one of my babies went
14 missing, it would be like walking away with my leg, or my
15 arm, or -- or something that I need because I couldn't
16 imagine. I couldn't imagine what you go through, Mom. And
17 you're so strong every day for getting up every day because
18 I wouldn't be able to do it. You -- you're not weak.
19 You're not weak. And, yeah, she turns to a negative
20 alternatives, but you know what? She get's up every day.
21 She goes to work every day. She's a good mom to me. She's
22 an excellent grandmother to my kids. And, yet, she has to
23 carry that burden with her every day. Every single day.

24 And you inspire me too, Mom. I --
25 I don't -- I don't know -- know much more what I can say.

1 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: That's okay.

2 MS. JANET LOWTHER: I -- I don't know. I
3 think -- I -- and I hope I'm not missing anything, but --

4 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: It's okay. I'll ask
5 you a couple questions from (indiscernible).

6 MS. JANET LOWTHER: And I said I wasn't
7 going to cry.

8 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: (Indiscernible).

9 MS. JANET LOWTHER: I'm going to cry. I
10 just -- sorry.

11 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Don't be sorry.
12 It's okay. Just take moment, and I'll ask you some
13 questions, okay?

14 MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

15 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Would you like some
16 water? Here, take this water. Is this one yours? The
17 cup?

18 MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

19 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Here you go. Do you
20 want more?

21 MS. JANET LOWTHER: No. Thank you.

22 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. Is it okay if
23 I ask --

24 MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

25 MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: -- a couple more

1 questions?

2 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Yeah.

3 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. Thank you so
4 much for sharing. Both you and your mom have really opened
5 up your hearts today and shared a lot. With your
6 permission, I do have a couple questions because I do know
7 that some of the story you were hoping to cover, not just
8 about your experiences with the police, but also
9 experiences with other government service providers. So if
10 I could just ask a couple questions.

11 I understand that in 1996, Helen, you -- you
12 contacted Manitoba because when Amanda went down to
13 Winnipeg, she was only 17. So she voluntarily put herself
14 into CFS custody so that she could access the programming,
15 and the -- the counselling and therapy she needed. So you
16 want to find out what had happened, and one of the things
17 you received was a letter explaining that the -- the
18 voluntary placement had been terminated. Did you want to
19 say anything about this letter?

20 **MS. HELEN BIGNELL:** Like I was saying about
21 when I was -- when Amanda -- I -- I didn't know what to do
22 with Amanda when I asked her if she wanted to go for that
23 counselling, that's when we got into that -- I -- I didn't
24 even know she was going to go see a CFS worker. I thought
25 she was going to go in for counselling. This is what I

1 wanted her to do. Then the next day, she comes back to me
2 and she tells me that she's going to go to Winnipeg. And
3 that's when this Donna Janzen or whoever it was that she
4 was supposed to have spoken to, and then, said that -- that
5 she was going to go to school there. So I assumed that's
6 where -- that's where she -- she was going to go to school.
7 Just as long as I knew that she was going to go to school,
8 so I put my trust in her to do it. To do what she said she
9 was going to do. And then I, what you call it? Got this
10 letter, that she had left. They said that she had
11 voluntarily left, and she was terminated from there.

12 And all this time, here I thought she was
13 going to school. I didn't even know that she was put in a
14 safe house. And then -- so I thought -- that's what I
15 said, "Well" -- I would wait for her to call. And she
16 never called me back.

17 That's when I started, I went to the cop
18 shop here, and I reported her missing. And it was a woman
19 cop at the time. If I would of known what -- now that I
20 would of known then, to -- to be able to take her name down
21 and her badge number and everything like that, it wouldn't
22 have been so hard. At least I know who I would have been
23 talking to. Because she told me -- she said that, "Well, I
24 can't do it because -- well, Amanda was not -- was not
25 being missing from here. You had to do it in Winnipeg."

1 So that's when, like I said, well, that's when we sent -- I
2 sent Amanda -- Janet there.

3 I was so bitter again. And then when --
4 like, when Janet did that and she had to do all that
5 running around, she came home and she told me, "I had a
6 real bitter feeling against -- towards that CFS worker."
7 She tries to keep in contact with me, but I can't find it
8 in my heart to -- to forgive her because I, sort of, blame
9 her for it, for taking her from home. When all I wanted
10 was her -- was to get counselling.

11 And, like I say, it -- like, I carry a lot
12 of resentments against the -- the justice system. And then
13 we keep in touch with this lady. And for the last 15 years
14 I keep hearing the same thing all the time. But in the
15 last time she phoned, I told her, I said, you know, I said,
16 "You don't have to tell me what you're going to say." I
17 said, "I already know." But -- but I tell me. Because I
18 said, "I hear it over and over all the time from yous."

19 Even we -- we, what you call? We find
20 people telling us things. I asked her to look into it. I
21 don't know if she did or not. And then, like I said, I
22 just -- I gave up on the justice system. I have no faith.
23 When like I -- like Janet said too, like, we have to do
24 this. We have to teach our kids to watch out, to be
25 careful.

1 Because I know what it's like because I grew
2 up too in alcoholic environment, and being what you call
3 it? You know, hiding and -- and -- from my uncles, and my
4 aunts, and them drinking. And I used to sleep underneath
5 the bed just to -- to not watch them to do the things that
6 they did. I grew up alone, pretty well. The only -- being
7 the only girl, I was -- and then all my running around.
8 The rest were all boys. And then being molested. You
9 know, and this is the kind of childhood I brought up. I
10 normally didn't have any help in my life right. Nobody. I
11 had to find out everything all on my own. And, I guess,
12 more or less, I kind of pass it on with my own kids. I
13 don't know if I -- if I blame my -- blaming myself. I
14 don't even know anymore because I, like I said, I feel so
15 lost.

16 And on -- I worry sometimes too, like, I
17 could never heal what I feel. And that's the only way I
18 know is, when my time comes, I hope Amanda will be -- will
19 be there with -- waiting for me. And I don't even know
20 what else to say. It's just -- see, just watch over your
21 children too, please. Talk to them. Talk to your kids,
22 and your grandchildren. Thank you.

23 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** (Indiscernible).

24 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Yeah. I -- I do.

25 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. Perfect.

1 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** I'm -- I'm okay to talk?

2 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Yeah.

3 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** I just, kind of, want to
4 add on to that. See, there CFS went and intervened because
5 CFS knows what's right and what's best for children, right?
6 They know what's right and what's best for them. Now, why
7 would CFS take my sister away from our community, knowing
8 that she had problems? Knowing that she had substance
9 abuse problems? Knowing that she drank? Knowing she was a
10 frequent run-away? Why would they put her in Winnipeg away
11 from her parents? Where she's unsafe. Where they know
12 more than likely she has a very high chance of running way.
13 If they know what is best for our children, if they know
14 what's better for our children than the actual parent do,
15 then why did they send her to Winnipeg? Why did they send
16 her there? I don't understand that portion. They
17 shouldn't have sent her there.

18 You know, if they even took the time to look
19 at Amanda's profile to find out who she was as a person, a
20 monkey could have told you Winnipeg is a bad place to send
21 her. Don't send her there. And then to notify my mom by
22 mail, that my mom -- that my sister left? That's -- and
23 they know she didn't have much family. No close family
24 anyway. Just people that we are slowly getting to know at
25 that point in -- in life. Like I said, we were a broken

1 family. We didn't really know our relatives. So meeting
2 our relatives in Winnipeg was kind of like meeting
3 strangers.

4 So why would they send her that way?
5 That -- that blows my mind. That baffles me. I don't
6 understand, since CFS knows what's best for us. And they
7 know they're better parents than we are. And they -- they
8 know everything. So -- so I would really like CFS to come
9 forward and tell me why did they send her there, if that
10 was the best thing for her. If that's where she was
11 supposed to go and get help. And why did they notify my
12 mom by mail?

13 At one point I do recall, I think, it was
14 Donna Janzen saying that she reported Amanda missing, which
15 was a load of crap. That was not true. There was no
16 report made at all. There was nothing done. And I too see
17 her around the community, but I don't point fingers. I
18 don't blame. You know, maybe at that point she thought she
19 was doing right. And, yet -- yet she just obviously did
20 not know Amanda. And she obviously did not take the time
21 to get to know her to the point where you'd realize, okay,
22 that's -- that's -- this is a bad idea sending her this
23 way. But, yeah, that -- that's my take on that. On -- on
24 that -- that letter.

25 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So that -- there's a

1 couple of other things. And maybe I'll just, kind of,
2 introduce them, and then you guys can speak to them. There
3 is a fax from Child and Family Services, and it's -- looks
4 like it sent inter-office. And the worker sends a -- a fax
5 saying, "This picture's a few years old. Amanda Sofia
6 Bartlett." And they give the date of birth. "Aboriginal.
7 When I last saw her -- her two front teeth were crooked.
8 Her mom would just like to know if she's okay. Thanks a
9 lot. I will call her mom tomorrow for a more deal --
10 detailed description." And then there's a picture attached
11 on page 2. This is written July 10, 2002. When -- when
12 was Amanda missing again?

13 **MS. HELEN BIGNELL:** In about '98.

14 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Ninety -- yeah.

15 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** No. 1996 --

16 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** '96.

17 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** -- 1997.

18 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So that's one thing
19 that we know. So someone, sort of, well after the fact
20 seems to -- to be sending pictures. And then there was a
21 program that you guys were referred to when you weren't
22 getting help trying to locate Amanda. At one point you
23 got -- if I understand, and you can please explain to the
24 Commissioner, you got referred to the Salvation Army.

25 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** M'hm.

1 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** For the purpose of
2 the immigrant family tracing process. And they let you
3 enrol in it. And this next document includes, sort of,
4 like, the rules and how. So there's a letter in the rules
5 in how you can apply as well as the application. The only
6 thing I request, is removed -- or that we have a -- like a
7 redaction on any -- any of the families' names that's on
8 the application. Otherwise, the rest of the document. So
9 if I put it up, I just ask that any third party names are
10 redacted from this document. Thank you.

11 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** I -- I think I remember
12 that. I remember that. When I -- when that was
13 another -- that was another option that the police gave me.
14 They were -- said, "Well, try going to the Salvation Army.
15 You know, they help people." So I went over there, and I
16 explained the situation. And the lady, kind of, like,
17 asked me, she's like, "Why did they send you here? Like,
18 this is for missing immigrants." I was like, "I don't
19 know. Can I just file anyways?" It's like, anything is
20 good. I'll take what I can get because I ain't getting
21 much. I remember that day. My sister's not even an
22 immigrant. But, yeah, that's how seriously we were taken.

23 And those -- that -- that's just -- that's
24 just a little bit. That's just a little bit that you guys
25 are hearing. There's more. There's so much more, but I

1 just can't remember everything because you don't even know
2 how many phone calls I made, or how many hours I sat in
3 front of the computer looking for different places to send
4 my sister's missing person's poster that I made. And then
5 the Winnipeg -- if you go on the Winnipeg Police site, and
6 you look up my sister's thing, it's wrong, on her poster.
7 It's wrong. I've called a couple times and told them.
8 They haven't changed it. So I didn't bother anymore. I
9 gave up. So -- but, yeah, that was just another slap in
10 the face we received.

11 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Can I ask another
12 question?

13 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Yeah.

14 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Do you mind if I ask
15 you about the tattoo on your --

16 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Sure.

17 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. So we know
18 that you went, because it's been as you said 22 years,
19 through so many processes and tried different ways and
20 means to actually find your sister. And a lot of it's been
21 your own initiative. And I know you also just told the
22 Commissioner, you know, you guys have decided that you just
23 need to have ceremony. Put your sister's spirit to rest,
24 and probably stop looking. And I know there's a couple
25 reasons for that, but I couldn't help but noticing I think

1 the first time we met, that on your hand you have a tattoo.
2 Can you tell us what that says?

3 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Twenty years after
4 Amanda went missing, I tattooed her on my arm. It says,
5 "No stone left unturned. Amanda Sofia Bartlett." Since I
6 can't bury her. I can't give her a ceremony. I tattooed
7 her on my arm because I want her to grow old with me. I
8 want her skin to get old, and this portion of my arm is
9 her. We're going to grow old together. In spirit, she's
10 here with me. That -- that's why I tattooed her on my arm.

11 And I told her, I said, "I'm not going to
12 torture Mom no more." I'm not going to put her through
13 anything anymore. I'm not going to do this anymore. I
14 told Amanda, and I talk to her in my head. You know, so
15 this is my closure. And, you know, we can't have a grave
16 stone, but we have something permanent, so she's with me
17 all the time. She's with me every day. And I like the
18 fact -- I put it right here, so people can see it. And so
19 people can ask me, "Who's Amanda?" And there's my
20 opportunity again to talk about her.

21 So, yes, we are going to grow old together.
22 She -- she left us too young. So, yeah, she's going to get
23 wrinkly, hopefully not too wrinkly. But, yeah, she'll grow
24 old with me forever. So that's what that represents.

25 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And one of the

1 things you also said was, you know, you're not doing more
2 searching. You're not doing more -- you make peace. You
3 had that conversation with her, but it's -- you know, I
4 don't believe you're giving up because one of the things
5 you've been sharing with the Commissioner is this --
6 keeping her name alive. This teaching our youth.

7 And I know that that's one of your really
8 important recommendations is, that we have to invest in
9 education, particularly, of Indigenous children, but of all
10 children, about things like consent and healthy
11 relationships. Did you want to add anything else about
12 that as a recommendation, and where it needs to happen and
13 start? Like if -- like, is it just First Nation
14 communities? Where do we need to have this education
15 taking place?

16 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** I guess, it would -- I
17 guess, that would depend, really. I really do feel like
18 because, like, I'm speaking for myself with my community.
19 I live on a reserve. I live in -- in The Pas. And I speak
20 more about my -- my community. Yes, definitely on
21 reserves. I believe every single age group should have
22 something for them, where they have to learn. And like I
23 said, healthy boundaries. What's right and wrong. Healthy
24 and unhealthy touching, things like that. And then, like,
25 each -- as they grow older, something. Something for each

1 one, right until they leave to grade 12.

2 I've -- I didn't really put that much though
3 into it, but I do and -- I do feel like there's things like
4 that that need to be utilized. And -- and not only that,
5 but off-community, we do have a lot of Aboriginal students
6 that are attending school in the cities. We should be in
7 there too because, like, you know, sometimes even -- it
8 even happens to people of other races. You know, maybe
9 they can pick up on it. Maybe if it's put into more -- all
10 schools throughout Canada. White schools and Native
11 schools, all of them. Then maybe our children will grow up
12 and learn to be more empathetic. They'll be more
13 understanding to our situations as Aboriginals. Make
14 things different. Make a change. I think, honestly, I
15 think it's too late for my sister. But it's not too late
16 for my children.

17 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** One of the things,
18 in terms of that education as well is, you know, you talked
19 about how you experienced the system as an Indigenous
20 woman. What are the types of recommendations around either
21 education or teaching people empathy outside of our
22 communities that is needed? So is it special training? Is
23 it special training? What -- what is it you think needs to
24 happen?

25 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** In everyday teachings

1 that I get, don't necessarily come from books, it will come
2 people I talk to. I get -- I learn a lot from Elders. And
3 ironically, I got -- I learned empathy from a movie.
4 Something I'd really recommend to people, is "Tuesday's
5 with Morrie." It's a really good book. It's a book,
6 there's also a movie. They talk about empathy a lot, and
7 how you can make a bad situation into a good one by just
8 being understanding by putting yourself in someone else's
9 shoes. And I use that in every day life. And I teach my
10 children that, to be more understanding. And if you're
11 more understanding, than that makes less room for anger and
12 hate. I think that empathy has got to be taught to
13 everybody. Not just children, some adults need it too.

14 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** So when we're
15 talking about education and stuff too, you know, you've
16 talked about all kids learning about relationships and
17 consent, and what good love it. Should there be
18 specific -- would it be your recommendation that there be
19 specific learning opportunities for boys and men?

20 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Absolutely. Our boys
21 need to learn their role. They need to learn that they
22 were supposed to be our protectors. Them too, abuse
23 happens with them. Sexual abuse happens with them. We
24 even have missing Native boys. We have boys that are being
25 murdered. This is hard because there's -- just there's so

1 much going on right now in life, right now. Like, I think
2 it was the Bushby [sic] case in Saskatchewan. That too.
3 It's got to be addressed.

4 You know, maybe there's something we can put
5 into the schools for the boys to teach them to be more
6 careful with whatever it is in everyday aspects. They need
7 to learn repercussions and consequences of their actions.
8 Sometimes people go into things thinking that nothing's
9 going to happen to them. And, you know, maybe if they were
10 told, "Okay. There is repercussions, there's consequences,
11 and these things can stick with you for the rest of your
12 life." You know, "You have -- choices you make right now
13 are going to effect you for the rest of your life."
14 Someone needs to go in there and tell them that, and teach
15 them, for the boys. But, yeah, I honestly think, you know,
16 I don't have all the answers for everything. I don't. I
17 don't even have -- come close to it. You know, there's
18 people probably thinking that I'm wrong. And they're
19 entitled to their opinions, but honestly, I do think that
20 we definitely need to implement things into the school and
21 to the curriculums. We have to. And we have to start
22 today.

23 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** At the beginning,
24 when you were first actually sharing about Amanda, you did
25 kind of say, you know, you're kind of, you said, "Well,

1 we've kind of exhausted looking for her. But there's
2 things I still participate in, like, marches and walks.
3 But you've done a lot of advocacy too in -- in the
4 community around missing and murdered Indigenous women.
5 And your family has held different visuals and
6 remembrances. How important is that to -- to sharing
7 Amanda's story, or other women's story? And what do we
8 need to do to keep mobilizing people to participate in
9 these things?

10 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** But that -- that's hard.
11 That's a hard question. Sometimes when we'd go for our
12 walks, we do have -- well, I noticed our groups are getting
13 bigger in The Pas. Where I work, at University College of
14 the North, we have a -- a very dedicated group of ladies
15 that do address these issues too. And they put -- they put
16 on walks and stuff like that. And they raise awareness to
17 certain issues. And we have feasts. And I just feel like
18 we could have more participants, which would be nice. And
19 I -- I don't know how to get more people out there. And --
20 and to be taken seriously.

21 One thing we did was we went and we put
22 ribbons up across the bridge, all the way across the
23 bridge. We have one bridge in The Pas. And, yeah, we held
24 up traffic. And the people who were waiting in line, and
25 waiting for us to tie our ribbons, they weren't sympathetic

1 at all. We've actually had some people yell at us that
2 this is a F-ing waste of bullshit time, and scream at us,
3 and tell us to hurry up. So, yeah, I -- I would -- I -- I
4 don't know. I -- I don't know about that part. You know,
5 I -- I don't know how to take hate away from someone, or
6 ignorance, you know. Some of us were born with empathy,
7 some of us were born with good hearts, some people were
8 just born plain ignorant. You can't change that, you know.

9 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** But you'd agree that
10 taking those moments and mobilizing community to have those
11 types of memorials with that information, is really an
12 important thing to do? And can contribute to some healing?

13 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** It hasn't helped me.
14 I -- I do believe that, yeah, maybe as more people are
15 getting aware of the issue, the walks, yeah. Well, I -- I
16 don't know. I guess, any publicity is good publicity. So
17 if you go up and you hold up traffic and people are yelling
18 at us and saying we're wasting time, but at least they're
19 seeing the fact that the impact that it's having on us.
20 It's their choice of whether or not they're going take it
21 in a good way or in a bad way, I suppose. But, yeah, it
22 hasn't help me any. But it could help other people. Like,
23 I'm only speaking for myself.

24 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** And what about this
25 poster? Was that when you -- is this -- oh, and this

1 was -- was this your poster?

2 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Yeah.

3 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay. So I -- I
4 just happen to be holding a poster. Can you just briefly,
5 Helen, explain what that poster is for? It's the February
6 14th Valentine's Day Remembrance, honouring their lives.
7 It's gathering to remember those we have lost due to
8 tragedy. Did you want the --

9 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Just that one.

10 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Just pass her the
11 microphone.

12 **MS. HELEN BIGNELL:** Oh, this one. This one
13 here on Remembrance Day, that was when I went to -- in
14 Regina, and then -- then I met a couple people over there.
15 And actually, there wasn't very many people. There was
16 maybe about, say maybe about 20 people out there when we
17 were standing out in the cold, and doing all -- they were
18 doing this. And -- for -- for honouring the missing and
19 murdered men and women, so I joined that. And they also
20 gave me a what you call it? A jacket -- a -- a bunny hug,
21 sort of thing, with a -- honouring the missing, which I
22 still wear today when -- on special days like this come up.
23 And then I -- I'll put -- I'll wear that. And that's
24 basically what it is.

25 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Thank you. Can you

1 give that back? I'm just going to pass that up to the
2 Commissioner. Thanks. There's also a picture there --

3 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Yes.

4 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** -- on it. In some
5 places though, we've been seeing more and more grouping
6 and -- and rallying. And so that type of mobilization, do
7 you think it's having an impact on sharing the issue? And
8 I know you take the position that it hasn't help you guys
9 find Amanda, but how do you feel about supporting that type
10 of community gathering?

11 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** I -- I -- I'd probably
12 support it. Right now, at this point in my life, I'm just
13 at a standstill. I'm still debating. I have my ups and
14 downs about things. I would like to participate more. I'd
15 like to get back into speaking again. But it just comes to
16 a point where, you know, how the hell that saying go? You
17 can't beat a dead horse. And it just -- it -- it's not -
18 it's not like you go to these rallies and you talk and you
19 listen, and everything. And then it's done. It's not --
20 and it's never done for my family.

21 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Yes.

22 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** It is never done. We go
23 to these rallies, and even today with this thing, what's
24 going on today, we have to go home. And then my mom has to
25 carry that. And we have to watch her. We have to watch

1 step-dad, it breaks his heart. And sometimes he just says,
2 "You know, I wish your mom would stop, Janet." He goes,
3 "She's killing herself." And so I try and respect that the
4 best that I can, you know. Just give my mom little bits
5 here and there. Tell her what she needs to know. And try
6 and hide the negativity from her. It's hard to do,
7 especially when she's learning Facebook. And she's
8 learning Facebook. I got her -- I got her a laptop, and
9 got her internet, and everything. And got her set and
10 going. So now, it's kind of, hopefully she doesn't learn
11 too much.

12 But, yeah, I just -- it -- it's hard to hide
13 certain things. And it's -- and when it does, when it does
14 hit her, it hits hard. And -- and -- it -- it effects the
15 whole family. It effects our whole household because we
16 live together. I still live with my parents. You know,
17 they opened their door to me when I needed them the most.
18 And they let me in. And so we're all helping each other
19 with -- with all of the things that are going on. We're
20 protecting each other from life, basically. You know, it's
21 been -- I always tell my mom, "You know, what's important
22 is what's between these walls. What we have right here,
23 the people who's in it is what's important."

24 But going back to the -- the rallies, and
25 the walks, and stuff like that, but -- I think for maybe

1 for other people, and to raise awareness, and you know,
2 maybe get on the nerves of some ignorant people it's good.
3 But -- but for us, no. It's not healing us. It -- it's
4 not working. And I'm not a doctor, and I'm not the
5 smartest person in the world, but I know what's effective
6 and what's not effective. And for healing for my mom it's
7 not effective.

8 So there's something more that we need.
9 With the Inquiry, maybe if I was to ask the Inquiry for
10 something, you know, help my mom. Just help her. I want
11 to see her happy. You know, I know she fakes it. She
12 fakes it for me, and she fakes it for the kids, she fakes
13 it for her husband. But she deserves to be happy. This
14 isn't her fault. We all make mistakes. This is life. But
15 maybe the Inquiry can help her. Maybe -- you guys are all
16 smart people, and you have resources and things out there
17 that I don't know about. Maybe -- maybe there's something
18 my momma can have, or something she can go, or someplace
19 she can just give her soul a rest for a couple days, or a
20 week, or something. Because she definitely needs it. She
21 needs it. And it -- it's hard. But maybe -- maybe that's
22 something the Inquiry can look into is immediate help
23 for -- for my mom.

24 And I think I can handle it. I think I'm
25 doing okay. I deal with things in my own way. I deal with

1 it by talking about it. And I talk, and I like to talk.
2 But as for my mom, she -- she needs help. She deserves
3 happiness, she deserves peace. You know, I'm not telling
4 her to forget about Amanda. I'll never forget about her.
5 But there's got to be different ways of dealing with this.
6 And it just -- and in our home, and back in our community,
7 you know, nothing stays personal. It's too small. Our
8 community is too small, so my mom won't open up. And she
9 lacks a lot of trust now because things have been used
10 against her.

11 I think the Inquiry needs something to -- to
12 help with -- my mom's a victim as well. And she needs
13 help. And I -- I -- maybe that's something you guys can
14 start handing out to the families, in different places
15 where they can get support and get the help that they need
16 to move on with life. You know, I know my mom's never
17 going to be the same, but maybe she needs to learn
18 acceptance, or I don't -- I don't know. I'm -- like I
19 said, I'm not a doctor.

20 I -- I'm just -- she needs something, and I
21 don't know what it is. And, like, I can't give it to her.
22 And I keep trying just -- she just -- she said to me,
23 just -- "We just can't let go of Amanda. We just can't.
24 Because she's supposed to be there and she's not." And I
25 don't like the fact that my mom blames herself. And I -- I

1 don't know how to talk to her and tell her it's not her
2 fault and make her believe me.

3 And I just want to see my mom happy. I
4 want -- I want to see her, you know, rise above this for
5 Amanda. Because if Amanda's in Heaven, you know, she
6 wouldn't want to see my mom like this. And -- because
7 that's just how the kind of person she was. And -- but,
8 yeah. If the Inquiry is doing anything to help, then maybe
9 that's something they can do immediately too. Prevention
10 and some kind of healing or something for my mom. But she
11 needs something. I just don't know.

12 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Sorry. sorry.

13 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** That's --

14 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Okay.

15 (Indiscernible). I'm going to ask the Commissioner now if
16 she has -- yes. I was just going to ask, Commissioner, if
17 you have any questions or comments that you like to have
18 for the family? You need to talk about (indiscernible) --

19 **MS. JANET LOWTHER:** Me first?

20 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** You want to
21 say something, Isabelle?

22 **MS. ISABELLE MORRIS:** (Speaking Native
23 Language). I thank you for sharing. Even myself, I'm
24 holding back the tears when you're -- when you're crying.
25 And as a mom, as a kokum. And your -- your mother, you can

1 just see it in her eyes, the sadness. As women, as kokums,
2 we feel it too.

3 I'll share something with you. As a mom
4 that lost a son to suicide, the stages of grief that we go
5 through, it is just like -- like when my son had passed, he
6 had taken me -- those through the memories of his life.
7 Since when I gave birth to him. Like, I -- I always go
8 taken into a journey, a journey of memory. And -- and
9 those stages of grief. The one I credit the most was --
10 was to not want to do anything. Depression. But it came.
11 And these things that we go through, I was told by, like I
12 had so much support, Elders, friends, family, but most of
13 all, counselling too. And an Elder told me, "You have to
14 go through the process."

15 I know that anger is very strong. That's
16 the one that my husband and my son, that saw his own
17 brother hanging. They got stuck in that anger stage. They
18 got angry to the point where I was getting physically
19 abused by both of them. You see, one day they'll not
20 understand these different stages of grief. They don't go
21 and get counselling. We get affected, those of us that are
22 trying hard to heal ourselves.

23 I always remember I wanted to run away from
24 them because they were abusing me physically, mentally,
25 emotionally. So I wanted to run away, and I -- I remember

1 dreaming. I dreamt of my son. Here I was standing by the
2 door, and he was laying there on that bed, and he looked so
3 sad. And said, "What are you doing here?" He had sadness
4 in his face. He said, "Help them. Help them." And so I
5 woke up, and sat there, he said, "Help them. Help them."

6 So it was within my heart, the love that I
7 had for my son, that I did not run away. I would -- didn't
8 only help my son that seen his brother hang on that rope,
9 and I didn't only help my husband, I help his -- those
10 other ones that he left behind, that were grieving for him,
11 his friends, his cousins, his buddies, his hockey buddies,
12 his schoolmates, his classmates. I to this day, I wear
13 that ring he didn't get to wear. He graduated from Hardy
14 Parker (phonetic).

15 There was too much stuff that happened in
16 his life, that short period of time. And these are the
17 things I share with you because as family -- as family,
18 friends, relative, community, they're your supports.
19 They're there. Elders. In my work, I sit in Indian
20 Residential School programming. I would get sent to go sit
21 and hear those stories of those former residential school
22 clients. Many times, I feel it in my heart. Many times, I
23 hold back the tears because I'm there for them. I'm there
24 for the person. Only and after I'm done, I go out there
25 and I just let it out to the point where I just scream,

1 why, why?

2 And that's the thing, an Elder told me,
3 we -- you experience these things so that way you can help
4 others. But that's the thing, it's so hard sometimes.
5 When we walk this way, yes, many Elders had passed on and
6 left us behind. Many times I cry where -- help, help.
7 And -- and it's amazing how some help comes along. And
8 these are the things I'm sharing with you, to give you that
9 strength as a mom, as your daughter sitting there telling
10 your story.

11 I was part of that Helen Betty Osborne
12 Plaque Memorial back there when I was a student in KC --
13 KCC back then, now UCN. I was the third president student
14 that walked through that stage of raising money and all.
15 And the students, they had a hard time too. Because we
16 raised funds -- we raised that money to have that family of
17 Helen Betty Osborne to have closure because they didn't
18 have closure because of that silence that was kept there.

19 And then so we went -- I remember when I
20 became the third president of the Aboriginal Centre, I
21 said, "Did they see the family yet? Did they offer them
22 tobacco? Did they let them know what we're doing?" They
23 said, "No." "That we need to do that." So I remember the
24 Elder and his wife, John Martin, myself, another student,
25 we travelled all the way to Norway House to go meet them

1 and let them know what we were doing. And they were
2 honoured. I didn't notice -- I seen their mom, they were
3 having -- going to have that closure. So they said they'll
4 show up, and they did.

5 But I always remember the result of that, it
6 was during that time when I went to dance in a pow wow of
7 Norway House, I remember I lost my purse and I had my money
8 in there. And -- and it wasn't in the third -- until the
9 third day that the pow wow was going to be ending soon.
10 They said, "Isabelle, they found your purse." So I
11 remember going to get my purse, and that person shook my
12 hand, and there was money in his hand. I said, "Thank
13 you." And I remember emptying my -- my purse on that
14 table. I emptied that purse, I looked. I remember I was
15 looking for that Billy Ray Cyrus ticket there.

16 (Indiscernible). That Billy say rider -- Billy Ray Cyrus
17 came to Norway House. So that was -- I was just looking
18 for that ticket, but it was gone.

19 So anyways, I was looking and then this lady
20 comes along. I was standing there, and then I looked, and
21 she said, "Here, this should help you." And she handed
22 that -- and she was, "This should help you." And I looked
23 at her. And then I said -- said in my mind, "I will ask
24 her her name so that way I can send her the money." So I
25 remembered turning to her, and telling -- and she said to

1 me -- I said, "What is your name?" I said. She said,
2 "Betty Osborne." I remember I had given her a hug or --
3 hug before that. And then I -- I said, "What's your name?"
4 She said, "Betty Osborne." And in my mind I said, "Isn't
5 she dead?" And then I didn't say anything to her. And
6 than I said, "Thank you. Thank you. You're so kind. You
7 people are so kind." And then I went back to my purse.

8 It was almost the -- the pow wow was almost
9 ending, and it was -- the sun was setting. I went on
10 digging in my purse. So anyways, the -- later on, I was
11 lucky, I got Billy Ray -- I got to see Billy Ray Cyrus,
12 yeah, that night. Someone wasn't going to the -- the
13 concert, so I got to go. So anyways, so I went and someone
14 let me stay at their place too. So there was kindness onto
15 people.

16 I share this with you because -- see the
17 spirit lives on. I remember my kokum telling me when we
18 were young, (Speaking Native Language). My grandmother
19 used to say, "Don't -- not just like anyone. Take care of
20 them. Love them. You don't know if they were sent from
21 Heaven to come be on this Earth for awhile, or -- or for
22 another reason." But that -- I never got it until it
23 happened to me. I believed it right there.

24 So anyways, that -- telling Betty Osborne
25 plaque memorial that's at Guy Hill, is what was set up

1 for -- by the students back then. And then the
2 government -- after we did all that work, and everything
3 like that, the government decide, okay, we're going to have
4 a Helen Betty Osborne Foundation. So they -- they did.
5 And so they had a feast and they had a unveiling of the
6 plaque. And there were four people that came. We invited
7 a lot of people. And then there was this -- the one that
8 the police that unveiled the -- the records, that re-opened
9 the records of Helen Betty Osborne. And they went through
10 the process of justice. And they only incriminated one
11 person. There's all of that, and then when they unveiled
12 it.

13 And then I always remember, there was Eric
14 Robinson that was part of that too, a member of Parliament.
15 And then also, there was -- there was also the late singer
16 that made a -- a song, but he's long passed now. And then
17 there's John Martin, he was honoured because he helped us
18 students to carry the -- the plaque. And myself, I was
19 given a star blanket, and I still have it to this day.

20 So I share these with you. And then we had
21 that unveiling of the plaque. And then I always
22 remember -- I always remember when I told -- share that
23 story, when I said about the -- my purse, and then my
24 friend Helen Mayham (phonetic) she was taking the nursing
25 program too. And that I remember giving her that date of

1 the unveiling, I said, "Here, I'm inviting Betty Osborne to
2 the unveiling." And she looked at me in surprise. And she
3 said, "Isabelle, there's nobody by that name, but a 13-
4 year-old girl." So I got to hug her spirit.

5 I -- I don't usually tell -- I never told
6 people about this, but I now -- now, the world -- world
7 knows. So they can understand. Be careful in what you do.
8 Be kind to others. That with a -- a justice system that
9 goes on like this. You know, when I go -- I was invited to
10 a hearing, and man, it was hard work to see -- to have her
11 go through the process of hearing the person that got
12 killed, it was my friend. And that person that kill --
13 stab -- killed her, all because of drugs and alcohol. See,
14 drug and alcohol does -- it controls the mind, body, and
15 spirits. And that's it. That, you know, and so -- and now
16 with my son, I donate monies to the KTC Hockey. And they
17 said they -- that nobody has ever done that before. But
18 this winter they're not having hockey, so -- until next
19 year. Yeah.

20 So these things we -- we find ways of
21 honouring in the memory of the -- our loved one. And
22 that's what I wanted to share. And Betty Osborne's family
23 had a closure. And that's what's required. Yeah.
24 (Indiscernible).

25 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** I don't want talk

1 about (indiscernible).

2 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** *Merci*
3 *beaucoup.* The thing I want to say to the two of you to
4 start with it's, *merci beaucoup.* Do you understand my
5 *merci beaucoup?* And you said something, it's not a
6 question, but it did tattoo my mind, and it will stay for a
7 long time, and how we have to reverse that. You, me, and
8 all the women across Canada, Indigenous women. When you
9 said to us, and you know Canada is listening, I learn who I
10 am in the eye of society, government, and RCMP. And I am
11 not worth, and it's not -- it's just -- it's not just me,
12 it's all Indigenous women. We are breaking that. You do.
13 You do. And it's -- it's exhausting because you mentioned
14 frustration. And we've heard families across Canada, anger
15 also. Lots of anger. And we don't deserve that. I'm not
16 afraid to say it. We do not deserve that. We deserve
17 justice.

18 And by your voice, your message, this is
19 fact for me. This is true. And, yes, your mom and you
20 too, deserve help after this testimony. And we have the
21 obligation, even though Canada didn't put the money for us
22 to support families in that journey, in that Inquiry, we
23 created a pot, a budget, because we do believe that trauma
24 informed is important in a safe space. It's important
25 following and respecting the protocols, and also how you

1 want to do it. So we -- we believe in that. But we
2 believe also that we're all mom, or sisters, or women. We
3 have concern when somebody leaves this circle and go back
4 to the real life, where nobody's there, or we don't have
5 the support, or people are too busy, or we're afraid to
6 bother them. So, yes, we're ready to meet right after
7 this, to make sure that the after-care plan is appropriate,
8 is the one that your mom, you Helen, and you Janet, you
9 want. That's very, very, very important. Very.

10 And we're breaking this for your daughters,
11 for my two twins, my two -- my twins, my girl, boy. For
12 our kids, for also for Olivia (phonetic). You're here,
13 Olivia? Olivia, if she can stand up? She's the youngest
14 Commissioner. See. We're doing this for her. Yeah. Yes.
15 So she's not a survivor, but a woman. We deserve to be
16 women. I have to say thank you. And I admire your
17 courage, and the courage to tell. You are the proof that
18 something is wrong. Maybe I don't say it right in English,
19 but for me that was the truth. And I have to honour that.
20 And I know my colleagues, Maryiam, Kayak (phonetic), and
21 Bryan, and the staff, we're also human being. And we will
22 honour it. We will. *Merci beaucoup.*

23 **MS. DARLENE OSBORNE:** Thank you. Thank you
24 very much for your -- for your story. I know we come
25 through a lot of different emotions, what we go through.

1 And I can imagine, like, for 20 plus years, no help, no
2 answer. Of course, you'll feel like giving up. We -- we
3 went through the same thing. There was so much anger from
4 my husband, and our daughter, our sons. They were so
5 angry. And still today, they're very angry, the younger
6 generation because they know now what happened to our
7 granddaughter.

8 So what you mentioned there, you know,
9 you're going to have a ceremony, and after that you're
10 going to stay put. And, you know, we went through the same
11 thing. But, you know, one of my sisters-in-law told us, "I
12 don't know why you keep doing this. You know, why do you
13 keep doing it because, you know, every time you do
14 something, Matilda will back drinking. So it's not making
15 her feel any better." And we had to sit her down and said,
16 you know, "Wake up. You know, what are we trying to do?
17 We're not only thinking about Matilda, we are thinking
18 about our little grandkids, and other women, and other
19 men."

20 And so everyday Felicia (phonetic) is in our
21 mind, in our thoughts because every day she's with us. But
22 in a good way, we have good thoughts of her. We celebrate,
23 and we honour her on her birthday. And in the summers, she
24 used to like to dance pow wow. And, you know, we try our
25 best to go to -- to any pow wow because, you know, a young

1 girl dancing there, you know, we just admire, fancies all
2 dancers because she was one of them.

3 So every day, and every day we hear these
4 stories, you know, news about, oh, there's another young
5 girl missing. Every day. And it's so painful to -- to see
6 that. And so, you know, as a family, we pray for the
7 families, even though we don't know them. Even though we
8 don't -- we just met you today, but I feel it in my heart
9 because we went through the same thing. And whatever you
10 do, mother, don't ever blame yourself what happened.
11 Never. You deserve to be happy because you're lucky you'll
12 have a daughter that loves you, and your grandchildren are
13 there. I know we're told life must go on, but we think of
14 our loved ones in a good way. We have good memories of
15 them. And that's all I can encourage you to do. (Speaking
16 Native Language). I love you.

17 **REV. AGNES SPENCE:** Okay. I'll share a few
18 words too. A few words of thanks for the honour you have
19 for the -- the memory of your loved one. There's so much
20 strength, there's so much hope. I know I cannot even start
21 to say I know how you feel, but I do have two brothers that
22 went missing in the river, maybe 20 years apart. But
23 there's never been a closure. And we have never -- we
24 don't have a grave for them, no where to visit. So we
25 honour them and we remember them when we go to the river

1 where we lost them. But I share -- I thank you for sharing
2 because once the story is out, it's no longer only yours,
3 it's ours. It's everybody's that hears it. And I thank
4 you for being able to share. And I thank this Commission
5 for allowing us to hear the stories. And I honour you for
6 being so strong and never giving up. And I thank you all.
7 (Speaking Native Language).

8 **MS. FLORENCE CATCHEWAY:** I just wanted to
9 thank yous, and to share your -- open our hearts. You know
10 what? I love you. (Indiscernible) so much. Thanks for
11 being here. *Migwetch.*

12 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** *Merci*
13 *Florence,* Would you accept a gift from us? A beautiful
14 gift. Many people over the months across Canada gave us --
15 not to us, but to the Inquiry, eagle feathers for families
16 and survivors who comes here and share their truth to us,
17 and to the rest of the world. Some young men took from his
18 gireglia (phonetic) -- *comment* -- how do you call that?

19 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Regalia.

20 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Bustle.

21 **COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Regalia.
22 See, I almost said something else. The feather, because we
23 didn't have any more. A dancer -- a -- a person from
24 Listuguj, who lives in Kahnawake, drove back last week,
25 traffic. Took all the feather from his traditional hat for

1 the families. And an Elder from here walked along the
2 river not far from here and collect some eagle feathers.
3 So maybe you have from a regalia, or the Mohawk community,
4 or from here, but you have an eagle feather from us. And
5 there's some Labrador tea, where I was born. No. *Merci*
6 *Maître Big Canoe.*

7 **MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** Commissioner
8 Audette, I would just request that we have a ten to
9 fifteen-minute adjournment until the next hearing. Thank
10 you.

11 **--- Exhibits (code: P01P14P0202)**

12 **Exhibit 1:** Folder of two digital images displayed
13 during the public testimony of the family.
14 [P01P14P0202_Lowther_Bignell_(Bartlett)_Exh_
15 1]

16 **Exhibit 2:** Letter from Donna Janzen, Manitoba Child and
17 Family Services, to Ms. Helen Lowther, dated
18 July 18, 1996

19 **Exhibit 3:** Facsimile from Donna Janzen to Child and
20 Family Services dated July 10, 2002 (two
21 pages including photo of Amanda Bartlett)

22 **Exhibit 4:** Facsimile from (name redacted) to (name
23 redacted), Salvation Army dated February 11,
24 2008 (nine pages)

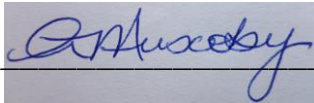
25 **Exhibit 5:** Photocopy of 3rd Annual Valentine's Day

1 Remembrance gathering poster (one page).

2 --- Upon adjourning at 3:38 p.m.

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Amanda Muscoby, 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.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A. Muscoby", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is contained within a light blue rectangular box.

Amanda Muscoby

May 9, 2018