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

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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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Public Volume 76
March 21, 2018
Witnesses: Janet Lowther & Helen Bignell
In Relation to Amanda Sofia Bartlett
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 Morrisseau, 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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Witnesses: Janet Lowther and Helen Bignell
Exhibits (code: P01P14P0202)
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
promised in. Can you take the microphone for a minute?

(Indiscernible).

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: So good afternoon.

It’s Helen? Hi, Helen.

HELEN BIGNELL, Affirmed:

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Okay. Thank you. And

I’ll promise in Janet right now as well.

JANET LOWTHER, Affirmed:

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Okay. Thank you.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: (Indiscernible) she’s going to talk into the microphone, but -- so if

you -- so bring the microphone up when you’re talking.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. It’s okay.

So I’m going to offer that either of you actually have the opportunity to begin, but I understand the place that you

want to begin sharing with the Commissioner is to tell us a little bit about the strengths, of Amanda’s strengths, or share some fond memories.

MS. JANET LOWTHER: I think I’m (indiscernible). My name is Janet Lowther. My sister is Amanda Sofia Bartlett. She’s three years older than I am. She went missing from Winnipeg, I believe, when she was around 17 years-old. And it’s been just about 22 years, and I -- I can’t remember her voice. I don’t remember how
she sounds. But I can remember her characteristics. She was so imaginative. She would read. She loved to read. She’d read all the time. She’d write stories, and all kinds of different stories. And she’d read them to me. Like -- and like, the stories she would make up were just amazing. And to this day, I still, kind of, think, you know, like, I -- I often reflect back on that, especially when I’m travelling, and you see the hills on the side of the roads. And she used to tell me, oh, those are dinosaur eggs in there, they’re waiting to hatch, Janet. One of these days, they’re going to get you. But, yeah, she always scared me like that.

And we spent a lot of time together. She babysat me a lot. And especially when mom would go to bingo. And she’d have to put me to bed, or -- and we’d go to bed, and we’d be laying there, and she’d start scaring me with her stories. And the one thing she did was she would flip her eyelids over, and she’d start talking in a different voice, and she’d be like, “I’m not Amanda no more. I’m a demon. I took over Amanda’s body.” And I’d be like, “Amanda, stop it. Stop it, Mandy (phonetic), you’re scaring me. I know that’s you.” “No. Amanda’s gone.” And she’d change her voice, and then I’d pull myself underneath the blankets. I’d be like, “Mandy, stop it. I will tell mom when she gets home.” And then, no,
she wouldn’t stop. And then she’d start, like, convulsing on the bed. And, you know, doing all kinds of crazy things. But, yeah, she scared me a lot with her stories. And she was so imaginative. She used to take me out and introduce me to all her friends. And Amanda was very accepting. She would -- never really hung around with a cool crowd or anything like that. She always seemed to be drawn to the misfits and to the -- to the odd balls, you know, like -- because that’s where she felt like she fit in.

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

She really enjoyed outside. Just -- she was just so -- she was just a all around good person. Everybody loved her in the family. She was the favourite auntie, which kind of got me jealous because, like, I absolutely love my nieces and nephews, but you can’t compete with someone like that, especially Amanda. And the way she was with children was just amazing. And children
were just drawn to her. It’s just how she was. I don’t know.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Pardon?

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

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

MS. HELEN BIGNELL: M’hm.

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

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. That’s good.

MS. JANET LOWTHER: (Indiscernible).

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Just --

MS. HELEN BIGNELL: Hi, my name is Helen, and I’m the mother of Amanda -- Amanda Bartlett. And bringing up Amanda was -- when she was small, well, when she was born, she was such a quiet little girl. Very quiet. And then, like, and she started growing up, and then started being friends with Janet, and -- and she was a very good, bubbly person, and very friendly with other people. I always taught my kids to try to be friendly with people. And to be kind to other people. And then, like, Amanda too, like, she was -- she like to read and tell us
funny jokes, and she’d do crazy things, and -- just to make us laugh.

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

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

So anyways, and I thought, “Well, she’d come
back.” And she’d come home. And she’d dress up, bathe
herself, and then -- and then out she’d go. And I’d ask
her, “You going to come home after school?” And she’d say,
“Yes.” And she wouldn’t come home after school, she’d be
gone again, just continued on.

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

And then -- and then finally, I, you know,
we sat down, and we talked together, and I asked her, I
said, “Amanda, what are we going to do? What am I going to
do to help you to -- to make you happy and just stop?” I
said, you know, I said, “It’s scary out there. There’s bad
people out there.” So I asked her, I said, “Do you want to
go for some counselling?” So I sent her to this provincial
building in The Pas to get some counselling for herself.
And then the next day, she came back and then she said,
“Well, Mom,” she says, “I’m going to go to Winnipeg.” She
said, “They said I can go to school there.” So I said,
“Well,” I said, “You’re 17 years-old now.” I said, “What -
"I says, "I have no control over you." I said, "You don’t want to listen to me." I said, I -- I said, "If you think this is what you want." I said, "If it’s going to help." I said, "Well, you can go." And it -- and then I says, "As long as I know that --" I said, "that you’re going to be going to school."

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

So anyways, so I -- I waited for her. And I thought, "Well, she was always managed -- she’s always get a hold of one of the family to let us know where she was,
or one of her siblings to know.” And then I knew she was okay. I remember when she was in Winnipeg, she’d do the same thing with my -- my siblings there. And then she went to my brother’s place and she stayed there and went and washed up herself. And then -- and then after that, my brother said that she was welcome to stay at her place. But she never came back. And then -- and we’ve -- I’ve never heard from her ever since. And we thought, “Maybe, well Amanda is Amanda. Maybe we’ll give it time for her to -- to come back.”

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

And then to lose Amanda, I -- I felt so lost. I think I lost myself after I lost her. And my life for me hasn’t really felt -- been the same. I think about her everyday. I blame myself. Why did I let her go? But Amanda was so set in her own ways. I couldn’t if I wanted to. And I was -- I was helpless. And I just kept carrying that guilt all the time. And then I -- I just got so -- I felt so -- anger -- angry. And then I felt so remorse. And I felt resentment. I didn’t even like myself. And I
just -- I just felt like I -- I lost -- I lost myself. And I still feel like that today. And I don’t know sometimes how I -- I cope with it. Sometimes I end up -- I just -- I think stupid. And I -- I just don’t even know where to begin anymore. I just feel so lost losing her. I never thought I would lose one of my children.

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

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

And we had -- and now we, what you call? We talk -- I talked to my -- my grandchildren about me watch -- to watch out when they go someplace. And to watch who the -- who they hang around with. All we -- don’t
sleep at where there’s parties. Come home. I kink
(phonetic) -- I think I -- the same thing with me, I think
it was the same way as being brought up that way. When in
an alcoholic environment -- and I did my life that way too
because no body ever taught me. So I, kind of, more or
less, kind of, got it taught from other people. I put
myself in church to try to get help there.

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

We searched for her. I don’t even know what
a human bone even looks like. What am I searching for?
And I don’t know, I just -- the only person that I --
really, really helped me through this was Janet. She was
the only one that really stuck close by me and helped me
through this. But I -- I’m really trying to turn -- trying
to turn my life around. But it’s so hard to do it because
I think too much. I’m even surprised that I’m not even on
the fourth floor because of the things that I think goes --
that goes through my head. But I still -- I still pray for
my daughter. And I still have hope. I’m just hoping that somebody will know something, where she is, or -- or she’s -- something. I don’t know what I’m hoping for, but I’m hoping.

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

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you, Helen. I know it wasn’t easy to share particularly a lot of, like, what you’re feeling, and what you’re experiencing. What we would like to ask to do, is to have the half hour lunch break. And after lunch, a number of things that Helen has actually described, we would like to unpack a little further, and provide some documentation on. So at this point, I would kindly request a half hour lunch break. Only 30 minutes, please, so that the family has the opportunity to come back and share the rest of their story. So at this time, if we could take 30 minutes and be back here at 1:30, that would be very helpful. Thank you.
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. Good afternoon, Commissioner Audette. We would like to come back to the hearing that we began just before lunch. We have Janet and Helen sharing the story of Amanda. Right before the break, Helen had actually shared a lot. She had covered a large timeframe because Amanda has been missing for some time. What we would like to do is, the family would like to have the opportunity to, kind of, unpack some of that story, so that the Commission understands the steps and processes they took in looking for Amanda, or trying to find out what happened with her. So I’m going to start with Janet, and ask her some questions about -- we heard Helen say that once Amanda went down to Winnipeg, Amanda had gone down to Winnipeg, so I want you to maybe pick up from there if you could, Janet? About how you guys started to try to find out, you know, what -- where did Amanda go, or what was happening --

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Okay.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: -- with Amanda?

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

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Please.

MS. JANET LOWTHER: We come from a blended family. My sister and I, we don’t share the same fathers.
We share the same mom, but different fathers. And during that time, kind of, things didn’t go well between the marriage between my mom and my late father. And my -- my father, he used me a lot to get to my mom. And he also used Amanda too. So we really got split at that point when my dad up and took me to New Brunswick where I was raised by my dad. And I haven’t seen my family in -- for years. I was taken from my sisters and my brother, and my mom. Wasn’t allowed to have contact with them, even though my mom did nothing wrong.

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

When I went looking for Amanda, I started off, I think this was, oh, I can’t even remember. My daughter, she’s 17 now, and she was going through a liver transplant as a baby. I think she was about one. And at that time, I actually went physically to Winnipeg and I made a report. I don’t know what ever happened to that, and the -- they were claiming that that never happened. And it did happened. It -- it happened. I was underage at
that point, but you know, I had so much going on. You know, I was at risk of losing my baby. She -- we’re waiting for a liver to become available for her, so who knows what could have happened in between that time.

And when she started getting better, and we -- we finally got a -- a liver for her and knowing that she was going to survive and be able to live a full life like the rest of us, that’s when I continued my search for Amanda. Now, I went back home to The Pas. And I was a young mother, you know. I was working at Tim Hortons, I didn’t make much money, so I couldn’t afford to travel back and forth to Winnipeg. So I thought, well, I’ll start here. I’ll start at home where Amanda was last living.

So I went to the police station, and they’re, “Oh, this is -- this is out of our jurisdiction. This is -- this is a Winnipeg Police problem. Take it over there.” “Oh, okay.” Go running over there, make my phone calls, you know, send all my paperwork. “Oh, no, no, no, Janet. This isn’t a Winnipeg Police problem. This is RCMP. Go back to The Pas.” “Okay.” Went back. “No, no, no, no, Janet. You’re wrong.” We go back to Winnipeg. “Oh, okay.” You know, just back and forth, back and forth. You know, more and more time is being lost. And that’s how it went on for just about, I don’t know, a couple years.

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

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

And then I got slapped in face. One cop in Winnipeg, he says, “Ahh, Janet, I’m sorry. You know, we don’t do family reunions here.” I was like, “All right. That’s fine. You know, I’ll -- I’ll take that.” And then another cop, “Oh, Janet, six years went by. Why are you even bothering? Why now? Why?” Well, it wouldn’t have been six years, it would have been two years less if you guys took me seriously in the first place. Whatever.
I got to this point where I was just, “Okay. I’ll do things on my own.” I sit home, sit on my computer, emailing her picture. I made my own little missing persons poster. So I started sending it off to homeless shelters, bus depots, airports, anything, anywhere, different towns, make my way around. I don’t even know if -- God only knows how many emails and phone calls I made just to ask people, “Can you put her poster up in case she came this way?” And remind you at this point, she’ll still not labelled as missing.

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

And -- and yet I followed through. And I got through to Child Protection, I think that was based out of Ontario. And this was my third slap in the face I got from the police -- from the government. It took me two
solid years to fight to get my sister labelled as missing, to get help. But did they take a statement from me or my mom? No, they didn’t. They took the statement from the lady from Child Protection that day. Like, so what -- what does that mean? Why? Why -- why was my word and my mom’s word not good enough? Why did they have to make us wait so long? Why did they bounce us around, and bounce us around, and bounce us around? Like, there was so many cops I spoke too, so many different investigators. She went into the cold case files, she went into everything. But, yet, I’ve never really got to know anyone personally who would sit down and talk with me and tell me what’s happening with my sister’s case.

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

Like, you know, when you teach your kids, I have four daughters at home, my oldest is 20, from 17 to 13
to 9, all the daughters, all girls. Now, I have to sit at home and I have to teach my girls, as you can see, they’re all right there. And I have to sit there and tell them that in the eyes of society, in Canadian society, we’re not valued as much as the other race. I have to tell them that. I’m not going to sugar-coat it because that’s how I protect them. And it’s a proven fact, and I’ve seen it. It’s a fact. Right there. As we’re not as good as everyone else because of the colour of our skin, because of where we came from.

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

I’m so frustrated, I’m so angry. I’ve lost faith. I got to this point where when Amanda went missing after 20 years -- she went missing, I tattooed her on me, so we’d grow old together. And I decided I’m not going to
look no more. Why? Why look?

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

And then when I -- when I talk to my daughters about it, like I said, I don’t sugar-coat anything. So I decided to continue on taking things into my own hands. And I will continue on. My daughters are very popular. They have many friends, lots of friends. And, like, I have kids constantly coming and going from my home. And for example, on really hot days, I set up a little slip-and-slide party in my front yard. We have a
sprinkler going, a little pool, and you know, we put a big
piece of poly, so the kids can slide back and forth. And
we usually -- we have a gathering of about, maybe, about 20
kids ranging from six to thirteen, around those age. And
majority of them are girls.

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

And then that’s when I go and I start to
discuss, you know, like, “She was -- she was a good girl.”
I tell them exactly how she was, the things she did. How
we fought, you know, like, siblings. And the way my
daughters fight, you know.

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

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

And -- and it’s -- you -- you know how
difficult it is to get a -- a group of 25 kids to be quiet
and to listen? Well, at this point, all these kids are
sitting there quietly, all of them. And all their eyes are
me, and I could just -- I can literally see on their faces,
that they’re absorbing everything that I’m saying. It’s --
it’s going. It’s hitting them in the brain, it’s hitting
in the heart, and this is something they’re going to
remember forever.

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

I go on to tell them about stranger danger.
“You know, we have strange vehicles come into our
community. You know, like, watch for that. Or if you see
one of your friends getting into a vehicle with someone,
make sure you pay attention to detail. Pay attention to
the kind of vehicle it is, the colour, try and look at
who’s driving. If -- even a licence plate if you can
remember.” I was like, “But, you know, if you look at, and
you remember those minor details, you could save somebody.
You could save your friend, or your cousin, or your sister,
or -- or anybody.” I was like, “You got to watch out for
each other. That’s what we do. And then if we do that,
then less of my -- of our sisters are going to go missing.
If we look out for each other, and we love each other, and
we be kind. You don’t have to be related.” I constantly
tell them that.

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

And then right then and there I realized, we
don’t have to wait for the government. We don’t have to
wait for this Inquiry, we don’t have to wait for the
police, we don’t have to wait for the RCMP. We can make
differences starting at home. From my -- from my doorstep.
You know, I don’t have the best home in the world. You
know, but right there in my doorstep, I started something.
And now, those little kids run home, and I have parents
come up and tell me, “Janet, I didn’t know you had a
missing sister.” So the ripple affect went on a little bit
more. And then I go on to tell them. And now, it’s adults
listening. And then it ripple affect more, and more, and
more.

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

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

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

I went to a seminar once, and there was a lot of women. And I talked about my suggestions of what I want to see happen. And I had a lot of women in there, and
I asked them, I was like, “How many of you have been a victim of abuse; sexual abuse, physical abuse, sexual assault, anything, by anybody? In your whole life, how many of you?” And I’d say about 90 percent of those women braised (phonetic) their hands. So I said, “Okay. Keep your hands up. Now, how many of you women reported it?” There was four. Now, why wouldn’t they report it? Because they didn’t know. Because they were scared. They had fear. There was family members, or whatever. They didn’t want to go through with whatever. They were -- felt ashamed of themselves. They had their reasons. But majority of it was because they didn’t know what to do. They were scared to step forward. They were scared to tell their stories, or whatever.

Now, this is continuing on. Now, if we were to implement that into, like, let’s say grade 5, 4, I bet you anything that those people that left their hands up, those hands would have been -- there would have been more people who reported that, who reported that violence, who reported of -- what happened. But it’s just the fact that they don’t know. People learn more when they’re young. Things sink in more when you’re younger. And -- and you carry it with you. So let’s implement that in our schools. Let’s teach that. Let -- let’s show them what’s legal, what’s not legal. Let them know that there’s resources out
there. If you’re scared, that there’s people to talk to about it. There’s people to come forward and help you through that situation, to get you out of that unhealthy environment. That you are a loving person. You are labelled, you’re a person, a human being that does not deserve that kind of treatment. Children need to know that.

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

I, myself, I don’t -- I didn’t know. I found myself in a 15-year relationship, where I was -- I was physically abused. And it took me a really long time to get out of it. And it wasn’t like I just walked in there and he started beating me up. No, it didn’t go that way. It started off with controlling. It started off with making me feel bad about the decisions I made, about the things I’ve done. And then it got to the point where I don’t even know what I like to eat anymore because he picked it out for me. He did everything for me because if
I didn’t do it, then I’d get beat up. I didn’t know. Now, if you were to take me back to 15 years ago, and you talked to me about how relationships, and how domestic violence starts, maybe I would have steered clear if I knew the result -- the end result of that. I would have.

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

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

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

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** (Indiscernible).

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

And -- and my sisters, and their children. They have to deal with that too, and cope with it. Our
family is so broken. In the past year, within -- it hasn’t
even been a year, my mom has actually lost -- suffered a
loss, a great loss. She found -- she got a phone call one
day that her sister committed suicide last summer. A
couple weeks after that, we got another phone call that my
niece committed suicide. My mom lost a granddaughter right
after. And then right after that, my mom lost her best
friend, within months. So we do come from a very broken
family. We’re -- we’re broken inside.

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

And how I was brought up in -- in learning
God and learning the -- the Bible ways, is that when you’re
in Heaven, you go back to your perfect natural state. There’s no tattoos, no scars, or anything. So I, kind of, took that dream and I thought, “Okay. Amanda’s in a good place. She’s with God, or with the Creator. She’s in Heaven.” She was a child when she went missing, so that automatically gave her her ticket into Heaven. So that, kind of, put me at ease at little bit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You know, I’ve yet to sit down and have them
project the vote, sit and listen to my mom. To listen to
the impact that it’s having on her. You know, they’re not
in my home. And they don’t see the lost look on my mom’s
face. You know, we’re sitting around having dinner, or
we’re sitting around watching a movie, or just doing things
as a family, and my mom’s there, but she’s not. And you
can see it in her face. She’s gone. Her mind is gone.
You know, they don’t see that. They don’t see the -- the
direct impact that’s going on inside our homes. I -- I
never understood why they never showed to these things.
Like, I honestly think like -- like there’s two empty
tables over there, how many investigators could be sitting
there listening to these?
I -- I really hope I’m not missing anything, but -- but, yeah, I -- I -- I’m -- I’m speaking out of frustration, not out of anger, but out of frustration. I’m speaking out of facts, and what I know, and from what I seen, and from what I experienced. And this is the honest to God truth. This is what we went through. And this is what we continue to go through. So I give up.

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

I find the hardest time of year is when the first snow because I think my sister’s in ditch or in a field somewhere. I know those are just bones by now, but, yeah, it must be cold. Little bit of snow covers her. Pray to God she’s not locked up in someone’s barn, or in -- in someone’s basement. But that’s something that sits there in my mind -- was -- and I know it does with my mom. And it eats us alive not knowing. I wish we were given
closure, but now we won’t know until we head onto the spirit world. And then that’s -- that’s when we’ll find out, but until then, like, what do you do? How do you heal from something like this? Or you don’t.

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

We need change in our communities. We need change and we need to help ourselves because we can’t rely on the government. I swear to God people, we need to make a difference for our future generations, for my daughters because they’re coming up into an age where they’re going to be going out on their own eventually. You know, I can’t keep them at home forever. But we do. We do need to start making that change at home. Don’t wait for the government. I’m pleaing, I’m begging you guys. Anybody who’s missing someone, someone who lost someone, talk about it. Prevent it. Prevention. Don’t let that name be forgotten. Start
making the change from your doorstep or from schools. Tell 
your stories, tell their stories, and don’t stop. Every 
opportunity you have, tell it.

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

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

And you inspire me too, Mom. I -- I don’t -- I don’t know -- know much more what I can say.
MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: That’s okay.

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

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: And I said I wasn’t going to cry.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: (Indiscernible).

MS. JANET LOWTHER: I’m going to cry. I just -- sorry.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: No. Thank you.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: -- a couple more
MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

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

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

MS. HELEN BIGNELL: Like I was saying about when I was -- when Amanda -- I -- I didn’t know what to do with Amanda when I asked her if she wanted to go for that counselling, that’s when we got into that -- I -- I didn’t even know she was going to go see a CFS worker. I thought she was going to go in for counselling. This is what I
wanted her to do. Then the next day, she comes back to me and she tells me that she’s going to go to Winnipeg. And that’s when this Donna Janzen or whoever it was that she was supposed to have spoken to, and then, said that -- that she was going to go to school there. So I assumed that’s where -- that’s where she -- she was going to go to school. Just as long as I knew that she was going to go to school, so I put my trust in her to do it. To do what she said she was going to do. And then I, what you call it? Got this letter, that she had left. They said that she had voluntarily left, and she was terminated from there.

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

That’s when I started, I went to the cop shop here, and I reported her missing. And it was a woman cop at the time. If I would of known what -- now that I would of known then, to -- to be able to take her name down and her badge number and everything like that, it wouldn’t have been so hard. At least I know who I would have been talking to. Because she told me -- she said that, “Well, I can’t do it because -- well, Amanda was not -- was not being missing from here. You had to do it in Winnipeg.”
So that’s when, like I said, well, that’s when we sent -- I sent Amanda -- Janet there.

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

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

Even we -- we, what you call? We find people telling us things. I asked her to look into it. I don’t know if she did or not. And then, like I said, I just -- I gave up on the justice system. I have no faith. When like I -- like Janet said too, like, we have to do this. We have to teach our kids to watch out, to be careful.
Because I know what it’s like because I grew up too in alcoholic environment, and being what you call it? You know, hiding and -- and -- from my uncles, and my aunts, and them drinking. And I used to sleep underneath the bed just to -- to not watch them to do the things that they did. I grew up alone, pretty well. The only -- being the only girl, I was -- and then all my running around. The rest were all boys. And then being molested. You know, and this is the kind of childhood I brought up. I normally didn’t have any help in my life right. Nobody. I had to find out everything all on my own. And, I guess, more or less, I kind of pass it on with my own kids. I don’t know if I -- if I blame my -- blaming myself. I don’t even know anymore because I, like I said, I feel so lost.

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

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: (Indiscernible).

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

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. Perfect.
MS. JANET LOWTHER: I’m -- I’m okay to talk?

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Yeah.

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

You know, if they even took the time to look at Amanda’s profile to find out who she was as a person, a monkey could have told you Winnipeg is a bad place to send her. Don’t send her there. And then to notify my mom by mail, that my mom -- that my sister left? That’s -- and they know she didn’t have much family. No close family anyway. Just people that we are slowly getting to know at that point in -- in life. Like I said, we were a broken
family. We didn’t really know our relatives. So meeting
our relatives in Winnipeg was kind of like meeting
strangers.

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

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

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

MS. HELEN BIGNELL: In about ’98.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Ninety -- yeah.

MS. JANET LOWTHER: No. 1996 --

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: ’96.


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

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

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

And those -- that -- that’s just -- that’s just a little bit. That’s just a little bit that you guys are hearing. There’s more. There’s so much more, but I
just can’t remember everything because you don’t even know how many phone calls I made, or how many hours I sat in front of the computer looking for different places to send my sister’s missing person’s poster that I made. And then the Winnipeg -- if you go on the Winnipeg Police site, and you look up my sister’s thing, it’s wrong, on her poster. It’s wrong. I’ve called a couple times and told them. They haven’t changed it. So I didn’t bother anymore. I gave up. So -- but, yeah, that was just another slap in the face we received.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Sure.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Okay. So we know that you went, because it’s been as you said 22 years, through so many processes and tried different ways and means to actually find your sister. And a lot of it’s been your own initiative. And I know you also just told the Commissioner, you know, you guys have decided that you just need to have ceremony. Put your sister’s spirit to rest, and probably stop looking. And I know there’s a couple reasons for that, but I couldn’t help but noticing I think
the first time we met, that on your hand you have a tattoo. Can you tell us what that says?

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

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

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

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: And one of the
things you also said was, you know, you’re not doing more searching. You’re not doing more -- you make peace. You had that conversation with her, but it’s -- you know, I don’t believe you’re giving up because one of the things you’ve been sharing with the Commissioner is this -- keeping her name alive. This teaching our youth.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: I guess, it would -- I guess, that would depend, really. I really do feel like because, like, I’m speaking for myself with my community. I live on a reserve. I live in -- in The Pas. And I speak more about my -- my community. Yes, definitely on reserves. I believe every single age group should have something for them, where they have to learn. And like I said, healthy boundaries. What’s right and wrong. Healthy and unhealthy touching, things like that. And then, like, each -- as they grow older, something. Something for each
one, right until they leave to grade 12.

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

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: In everyday teachings
that I get, don’t necessarily come from books, it will come people I talk to. I get -- I learn a lot from Elders. And ironically, I got -- I learned empathy from a movie. Something I’d really recommend to people, is “Tuesday’s with Morrie.” It’s a really good book. It’s a book, there’s also a movie. They talk about empathy a lot, and how you can make a bad situation into a good one by just being understanding by putting yourself in someone else’s shoes. And I use that in every day life. And I teach my children that, to be more understanding. And if you’re more understanding, than that makes less room for anger and hate. I think that empathy has got to be taught to everybody. Not just children, some adults need it too.

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

**MS. JANET LOWThER:** Absolutely. Our boys need to learn their role. They need to learn that they were supposed to be our protectors. Them too, abuse happens with them. Sexual abuse happens with them. We even have missing Native boys. We have boys that are being murdered. This is hard because there’s -- just there’s so
much going on right now in life, right now. Like, I think it was the Bushby [sic] case in Saskatchewan. That too. It’s got to be addressed.

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

**MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE:** At the beginning, when you were first actually sharing about Amanda, you did kind of say, you know, you’re kind of, you said, “Well,
we’ve kind of exhausted looking for her. But there’s
things I still participate in, like, marches and walks.
But you’ve done a lot of advocacy too in -- in the
community around missing and murdered Indigenous women.
And your family has held different visuals and
remembrances. How important is that to -- to sharing
Amanda’s story, or other women’s story? And what do we
need to do to keep mobilizing people to participate in
these things?

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

One thing we did was we went and we put
ribbons up across the bridge, all the way across the
bridge. We have one bridge in The Pas. And, yeah, we held
up traffic. And the people who were waiting in line, and
waiting for us to tie our ribbons, they weren’t sympathetic
at all. We’ve actually had some people yell at us that this is a F-ing waste of bullshit time, and scream at us, and tell us to hurry up. So, yeah, I -- I would -- I -- I don’t know. I -- I don’t know about that part. You know, I -- I don’t know how to take hate away from someone, or ignorance, you know. Some of us were born with empathy, some of us were born with good hearts, some people were just born plain ignorant. You can’t change that, you know.

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

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

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Yeah.

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

MS. JANET LOWTHER: Just that one.

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Just pass her the microphone.

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

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Thank you. Can you
give that back? I’m just going to pass that up to the
Commissioner. Thanks. There’s also a picture there --

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Yes.

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

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

MS. CHRISTA BIG CANOE: Yes.

MS. JANET LOWTHER: It is never done. We go
to these rallies, and even today with this thing, what’s
going on today, we have to go home. And then my mom has to
carry that. And we have to watch her. We have to watch
how it eats at her. For the sake of my mom, I’m basically
not doing anything anymore because I feel like I’m
torturing her. I feel like every single time I plan
something, or we get a tip, or you know, like, it -- it
never leads anywhere. But I find I’m hiding things from my
mom. I don’t want to tell her certain things because I
just don’t want to see her hurt anymore. I feel like I can
carry it better than she can, so I keep it to myself.

We get a lot of negative feedback,
especially, when we went on the news, or when we were in
the paper. And, you know, you -- you get to look at those
comments at the end. And there was a lot of negative
feedback on that from the community, from Winnipeg. And I
just couldn’t -- I just couldn’t show that to my mom. I --
I couldn’t show it to my family, so I carried that on my
own. And there’s a lot of things, like, I’m not hiding
things to hurt my mom. I’m protecting her. And I’ll
continue to protect her. So these rallies, yeah, they’re
good. They’re good. They -- they, you know, they’re out
there. They’re -- they’re getting the word out. You know,
they’re telling people that we do have a -- a major issue
that needs to be dealt with. But as for us, on our own
personal level, no, it’s not good for us. It -- it -- it’s
not good for my mom.

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

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

But going back to the -- the rallies, and
the walks, and stuff like that, but -- I think for maybe
for other people, and to raise awareness, and you know, maybe get on the nerves of some ignorant people it’s good. But -- but for us, no. It’s not healing us. It -- it’s not working. And I’m not a doctor, and I’m not the smartest person in the world, but I know what’s effective and what’s not effective. And for healing for my mom it’s not effective.

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

And I think I can handle it. I think I’m doing okay. I deal with things in my own way. I deal with
it by talking about it. And I talk, and I like to talk. But as for my mom, she -- she needs help. She deserves happiness, she deserves peace. You know, I’m not telling her to forget about Amanda. I’ll never forget about her. But there’s got to be different ways of dealing with this. And it just -- and in our home, and back in our community, you know, nothing stays personal. It’s too small. Our community is too small, so my mom won’t open up. And she lacks a lot of trust now because things have been used against her.

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

I -- I’m just -- she needs something, and I don’t know what it is. And, like, I can’t give it to her. And I keep trying just -- she just -- she said to me, just -- “We just can’t let go of Amanda. We just can’t. Because she’s supposed to be there and she’s not.” And I don’t like the fact that my mom blames herself. And I -- I
don’t know how to talk to her and tell her it’s not her fault and make her believe me.

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

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

**MS. JANET LOWTHER:** That’s --

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

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

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

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

**MS. ISABELLE MORRIS:** (Speaking Native Language). I thank you for sharing. Even myself, I’m holding back the tears when you’re -- when you’re crying. And as a mom, as a kokum. And your -- your mother, you can
just see it in her eyes, the sadness. As women, as kokums, we feel it too.

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

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

I always remember I wanted to run away from them because they were abusing me physically, mentally, emotionally. So I wanted to run away, and I -- I remember
dreaming. I dreamt of my son. Here I was standing by the door, and he was laying there on that bed, and he looked so sad. And said, “What are you doing here?” He had sadness in his face. He said, “Help them. Help them.” And so I woke up, and sat there, he said, “Help them. Help them.”

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

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

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

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

And then so we went -- I remember when I
became the third president of the Aboriginal Centre, I
said, “Did they see the family yet? Did they offer them
tobacco? Did they let them know what we’re doing?” They
said, “No.” “That we need to do that.” So I remember the
Elder and his wife, John Martin, myself, another student,
we travelled all the way to Norway House to go meet them
and let them know what we were doing. And they were
honoured. I didn’t notice -- I seen their mom, they were
having -- going to have that closure. So they said they’ll
show up, and they did.

But I always remember the result of that, it
was during that time when I went to dance in a pow wow of
Norway House, I remember I lost my purse and I had my money
in there. And -- and it wasn’t in the third -- until the
third day that the pow wow was going to be ending soon.
They said, “Isabelle, they found your purse.” So I
remember going to get my purse, and that person shook my
hand, and there was money in his hand. I said, “Thank
you.” And I remember emptying my -- my purse on that
table. I emptied that purse, I looked. I remember I was
looking for that Billy Ray Cyrus ticket there.
(Indiscernible). That Billy say rider -- Billy Ray Cyrus
came to Norway House. So that was -- I was just looking
for that ticket, but it was gone.

So anyways, I was looking and then this lady
comes along. I was standing there, and then I looked, and
she said, “Here, this should help you.” And she handed
that -- and she was, “This should help you.” And I looked
at her. And then I said -- said in my mind, “I will ask
her her name so that way I can send her the money.” So I
remembered turning to her, and telling -- and she said to
me -- I said, “What is your name?” I said. She said, “Betty Osborne.” I remember I had given her a hug or -- hug before that. And then I -- I said, “What’s your name?” She said, “Betty Osborne.” And in my mind I said, “Isn’t she dead?” And then I didn’t say anything to her. And than I said, “Thank you. Thank you. You’re so kind. You people are so kind.” And then I went back to my purse.

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

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

So anyways, that -- telling Betty Osborne plaque memorial that’s at Guy Hill, is what was set up
for -- by the students back then. And then the
government -- after we did all that work, and everything
like that, the government decide, okay, we’re going to have
a Helen Betty Osborne Foundation. So they -- they did.
And so they had a feast and they had a unveiling of the
plaque. And there were four people that came. We invited
a lot of people. And then there was this -- the one that
the police that unveiled the -- the records, that re-opened
the records of Helen Betty Osborne. And they went through
the process of justice. And they only incriminated one
person. There’s all of that, and then when they unveiled
it.

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

So I share these with you. And then we had
that unveiling of the plaque. And then I always
remember -- I always remember when I told -- share that
story, when I said about the -- my purse, and then my
friend Helen Mayham (phonetic) she was taking the nursing
program too. And that I remember giving her that date of
the unveiling, I said, “Here, I’m inviting Betty Osborne to the unveiling.” And she looked at me in surprise. And she said, “Isabelle, there’s nobody by that name, but a 13-year-old girl.” So I got to hug her spirit.

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

So these things we -- we find ways of honouring in the memory of the -- our loved one. And that’s what I wanted to share. And Betty Osborne’s family had a closure. And that’s what’s required. Yeah.

(Indiscernible).

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don’t want talk
about (indiscernible).

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

And by your voice, your message, this is fact for me. This is true. And, yes, your mom and you too, deserve help after this testimony. And we have the obligation, even though Canada didn’t put the money for us to support families in that journey, in that Inquiry, we created a pot, a budget, because we do believe that trauma informed is important in a safe space. It’s important following and respecting the protocols, and also how you
want to do it. So we -- we believe in that. But we
believe also that we’re all mom, or sisters, or women. We
have concern when somebody leaves this circle and go back
to the real life, where nobody’s there, or we don’t have
the support, or people are too busy, or we’re afraid to
bother them. So, yes, we’re ready to meet right after
this, to make sure that the after-care plan is appropriate,
is the one that your mom, you Helen, and you Janet, you
want. That’s very, very, very important. Very.

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

MS. DARLENE OSBORNE: Thank you. Thank you
very much for your -- for your story. I know we come
through a lot of different emotions, what we go through.
And I can imagine, like, for 20 plus years, no help, no answer. Of course, you’ll feel like giving up. We -- we went through the same thing. There was so much anger from my husband, and our daughter, our sons. They were so angry. And still today, they’re very angry, the younger generation because they know now what happened to our granddaughter.

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

And so everyday Felicia (phonetic) is in our mind, in our thoughts because every day she’s with us. But in a good way, we have good thoughts of her. We celebrate, and we honour her on her birthday. And in the summers, she used to like to dance pow wow. And, you know, we try our best to go to -- to any pow wow because, you know, a young
girl dancing there, you know, we just admire, fancies all
dancers because she was one of them.

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

REV. AGNES SPENCE: Okay. I’ll share a few
words too. A few words of thanks for the honour you have
for the -- the memory of your loved one. There’s so much
strength, there’s so much hope. I know I cannot even start
to say I know how you feel, but I do have two brothers that
went missing in the river, maybe 20 years apart. But
there’s never been a closure. And we have never -- we
don’t have a grave for them, no where to visit. So we
honour them and we remember them when we go to the river
where we lost them. But I share -- I thank you for sharing because once the story is out, it’s no longer only yours, it’s ours. It’s everybody’s that hears it. And I thank you for being able to share. And I thank this Commission for allowing us to hear the stories. And I honour you for being so strong and never giving up. And I thank you all. (Speaking Native Language).

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

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

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Regalia.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Bustle.

**COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE:** Regalia.

See, I almost said something else. The feather, because we didn’t have any more. A dancer -- a -- a person from Listuguj, who lives in Kahnawake, drove back last week, traffic. Took all the feather from his traditional hat for
the families. And an Elder from here walked along the
river not far from here and collect some eagle feathers.
So maybe you have from a regalia, or the Mohawk community,
or from here, but you have an eagle feather from us. And
there’s some Labrador tea, where I was born. No. Merci
Maître Big Canoe.

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

--- Exhibits (code: P01P14P0202)

**Exhibit 1:** Folder of two digital images displayed
during the public testimony of the family.

[Exhibit 1: P01P14P0202_Lowther_Bignell_(Bartlett)_Exh_1]

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

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

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

**Exhibit 5:** Photocopy of 3rd Annual Valentine’s Day
Remembrance gathering poster (one page).

--- 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.

[Signature]
Amanda Muscoby

May 9, 2018