Susan Clipping & Christine Merasty, 
In relation to Clara Dantouze

Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette
Commission Counsel: Shelby Thomas
II

APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
Government of Canada
Government of Manitoba
Manitoba Moon Voices Inc.
MMIWG Coalition (Manitoba)
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada & Manitoba Inuit Association
Winnipeg Police Service
Women of the Metis Nation

Non-appearance
Non-appearance
Lucy Bell (Legal Counsel)
Samuel Thomson (Legal Counsel)
Non-appearance
Non-appearance
Non-appearance
Non-appearance
Non-appearance
Non-appearance
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Witnesses: Susan Clipping and Christine Merasty Exhibits (code: P01P14P0203)
MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Okay. I think we’re ready to get started. Good afternoon, Commissioner Audette. This afternoon we’ll be hearing from Christine Merasty and Susan Clipping who will be sharing the story of Clara Dantouze. Mr. Registrar, they would both like to promise to tell the truth.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Okay. We’ll start with Susan. Okay. Good afternoon, Susan.

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: My name is Susan Clipping.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Oh, Susan, before -- just going to do a quick little formality first.

SUSAN CLIPPING, Sworn:

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Okay. And then I’ll ask the same question of Christine and then we’ll get going.

CHRISTINE MERASTY, Sworn:

MR. BRYAN ZANBERG: Okay. Thank you.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Susan and Christine, if we could just get started by having yourselves introduce yourself to the commissioner and telling us where you’re from.

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: My name is Susan
Clipping and I’m from Tadoule Lake, Manitoba.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** And I’m Christine Merasty and I’m from -- I live in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Christine could you just introduce your health support.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Oh, yes. And this is Agnes (ph) Dantouze. And she’s my cousin; that’s Susan’s daughter. And she’s our support.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** All right. Susan, can you share with the commissioner a little bit about Clara and who she was.

**MS. SUSAN CLIPPING:** Yes. Clara was my sister. She was a couple a -- about four years older than I was. Clara was a nice, joyful person. She always had laughter in her voice. She was always so willing to help people. And every person that she met or she knew always had good things to say about Clara.

I remember when I was a little girl something that made me happy that Clara did for me. At that time there was no dolls or no doll houses that we had. So one day, we’re living at a fish camp and I must have been getting bored or I had nothing to do so Clara made me a -- a doll house from a box that she found. She put the windows in there. She cut out the doors and that made me happy. Also, she made a doll. She -- she must have got
some -- a cloth somewhere, stuffed it with moss and she says, “Sister I made a doll for you. Now you’re going to be happy. You’re going to play with it in your doll house.” I always remember that -- a good memory about that.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Susan, can you share with the commissioner the impacts of losing Clara and the impacts of residential school on your family.

**MS. SUSAN CLIPPING:** When I went to residential school in 1963, I was five years old going on to seven year old. But at that time my sister had already been through residential school. I remember she wasn’t there. But my other brother was. My brother John (ph). And I remember my dad saying something about residential school that he felt impacted as -- he said, the time when the kids left for school, he said, they were all nice. They were kind to each other, not angry all the time. But now that you guys came back he said, “You children are different now. You get angry easily. You’re, like, scared.” Because in residential school we were unhappy. We were lonely. And then he saw that -- that we didn’t listen to him anymore. And he could never understand why. So that was the impact that my -- my dad noticed when we came back from residential school. And we were like eight, nine year old kids.
MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Susan, can you share a bit about what happened with Clara and how you received the information about what happened to her.

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: I always remember that in the fall time, this must have been in November. That day was a cloudy -- I always remember that vivid day. At that time my dad went to adult education, you know. And he took off. And I went to school at that time too, but I guess I didn’t go to school on time. Maybe I was going to hear this. But anyway, we’re looking out the window and there was two cops that were coming home with my dad, walking him home. I guess -- but he didn’t tell them when he met them because he didn’t hardly -- could speak English. Now, my dad said the cops met him. They told him, “We’re going to go to your house now. We got to take you home.” And dad was kind of puzzled, he didn’t understand. And they came in and my sister, my older sister, happened to be there. And then they sat us down and the cops start talking about my sister, Clara. And she said -- and he said, “Do you remember when was the last time you heard from your sister, Clara?” he said. And, like, at that time, there was no phone calls, no any kind of communication. And then we said, “No. We -- she just left here in August. And that was the last time we heard from her or seen her.” And then the cops start telling us
that she got killed Winnipeg, he said. They found her body. And he said, "This happened on Transcona Highways."
I always remember that Transcona. That never leave me. And then he start telling us the details about what happened to her. And my mother, she took it very -- very hard. I remember that. My mother went into shock. She just cried, just almost fell back. And the cops, they held her, gave her water and she came back. That’s how much we miss my -- my sister. My mom especially. My mom died with a heart -- heart -- heart broken. She could never get over the fact what happened to my sister.

And I have some details that I want to share. She came -- her body came back from Winnipeg. And I guess it was at the Bartle (sic) -- Bardal Funeral Home that they kept her body and that. And the minister at that time, you know, when they have a service for a person and they kept the body -- her body at my house for about three days. And when they took her body to the church, the minister said that she cannot come to the front of the church and get blessing. Because, Clara was, like, a sinner, he said. He judge her. Who -- I thought, "Who is he to -- to judge, you know." Everybody that dies, like, they get in front of the church to get their last blessing. And for the funeral they go into the -- the grave. But, Clara wasn’t given that chance. Everybody was sad because
they -- the -- at the back of the church, that’s where her body laid. Like, she got killed and now the priest judge her and give her -- destroyed her dignity, you know. That what bothers me lots today because of that minister what he did.

Although she was a very kind lady, always had a heart for everybody, always joyful, just an all around person. If she was alive today, she could have been meeting people, laughing, cracking jokes, everything. Clara had that kind of personality and traits that what my mom and dad had taught us to be like. So that’s what -- that’s what happened to her when -- when somebody took her life and ended it.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Susan, do you know what -- if anyone was charged with Clara’s murder? And if so, how did you receive that information?

**MS. SUSAN CLIPPING:** At that time, people were not really in tune with what happened in society. Like, the cops and what we’re told. Like, everything went through the minister that was in Brochet at that time. And whatever the cops told him -- tell him, they got to -- he -- and translated that to our parents and let the people know. And then that happened and then -- and when he said -- dad usually goes to visit the minister and he said that, “The minister said that they caught the guy that did that
to your sister.” That’s what he said. But there was no names mentioned. There was no details about it. It didn’t come from the cops. The cops was like a third party thing. They never came up to us and they told -- never told nothing like that. Just the -- the minister relay the message to us. Told us -- told my dad. And that -- that is how we got the -- the news that this guy was caught. But we never knew, no.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Christine, you did some research into looking to what happened to your mom and you came across some news articles. Do you want to talk about what you noticed in the news articles you found?

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** So my mom was murdered in 1973. I was adopted out. I was part of the ‘60s scoop. So when I -- when I found my family, they told me -- they told me that I’ll never get to meet her again because she was murdered. I never got to meet my mom, so I wasn’t reunited with her. So -- but that didn’t stop my interest. I wanted to know what happened. So they introduced me to her friends. And I asked her friends questions. And they told me that -- that they were -- that when she had me, workers -- so I’m assuming that meant CFS workers were at the hospital right away. And that -- that they were to take me for six months and that she -- she needed to, I guess, clean up her life a bit to get me back.
She agreed. She never got me back. I was adopted out at four months old. They just gave me away. So I needed to know more. So I started trying to understand the situation. I was raised in a white home. So -- and my parents, they never -- they raised me telling me I’m French. So I had no knowledge of being Indigenous. I -- in white community, very racist community, growing up with those kids over there was not -- was not good. Left me with a lot of anger. I -- so I had to understand that to; what was -- like, what -- what happened. Like, why? I started -- I started educating myself on the history of what took place because I’m a part of it.

To find out that my mom went to residential school, ended up drinking and living on Main Street in Winnipeg. And then I was born at that time. And then the government decided that I’m better off somewhere else so they just adopted me out. And then to find out that she goes missing and murdered, that I don’t get to be reunited with her which was -- I didn’t know her. Like, I never got to meet her but it was very sad for me because I grew up wondering, my whole life, who gave birth to me. Why -- why do I look the way I do. Who gave me these traits, right. Isn’t that what everybody does, like, when you’re a child. Oh, I look like my dad or I look like -- right. I didn’t have that chance. But then when I met my
family and I met my grandparents they loved me. So I wondered why the government never asked them to take me. Then I could have had a bond, something I didn’t have. My adopted parents did the best they could. My dad loved me. My mom loved me as best as she could to with her history. Her children didn’t. They didn’t like me. They didn’t accept me. The community -- I was just a little Indian kid. And I experience that racism a lot growing up. But what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, right. So you -- so what I did was became very proud of who I am as an Indigenous woman and taught myself. And I learned and asked a lot of questions from my family and from the community about who my mom was. But what -- what the government took from me -- what the government took was my culture and my language and my ability to speak to my grandparents while they were alive. And that would have been perfect if I could do that because they sure showed me a lot of love when I -- when I found them. But I didn’t have that. But I knew they loved me because of how they treated me. And that’s -- that’s what matters. And my family, they all love me. Like, they looked for me for 20 years while I’m in a foster home or in an adopted home. Not feeling connected there, feeling like this wasn’t my place to finding a family who loved me. And that’s where I should have been.
So -- so I kept searching for what happened to my mom. And I found news articles. And the news articles aren’t even the same. Like, the one in the Free Press says, Transcona. The one in the Winnipeg Sun says, Oak Point Highways. And they’re not even next to each other. That’s like -- they don’t even -- do you know what I mean. So the stories that are out there is different.

Then it says that she died at -- I think she -- she died at the age of 26. She was 21. The -- and then the police never even came to my family to say anything. So -- so to this day, and this happened in 1973, we still don’t know. 2018 and we still don’t know what happened to her. That’s not right. Like, no closure for our family. No understanding. No -- no knowledge of -- so I wanted to try and go put a cross where she passed on, where she lost her life. When I’m driving down any highway you see crosses, right, where people lost their lives. So I want to do that for her. She lost her life there. I phoned RCMP and Winnipeg Police. They don’t know who has the file. So then, my aunt, in 2016, also called and left a message for them to get back to her. They never called her back. So same thing. Just another Native woman. Like, it’s not a issue. It’s not a -- the families don’t matter. But she matters to us. It’s been a -- since 1973 but we still want to know. We have a right to know, she’s our family. They
MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Susan, can you explain to the commissioner how your family was consistently trying to reconnect with Christine over the years?

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: Like I said, in those days, people were not really familiar with Child and Family Services or anything to that matter about policeman and anything in society they didn’t really know. Like, there were Native people that live in -- in a bush and they didn’t speak English, they didn’t understand. Although the kids understood English then we were afraid to even mention a cop’s name or let alone talk to them about something. So we kind of just left it. Like, we’re -- we were young, we didn’t understand. And I remember my mom and dad they said, “In our culture if somebody is murdered or somebody take their life, he said they’re going to go to heaven,” he said. “So we’re going to leave her there as it happened and we’re not going to say nothing about it or -- we’re just going to let her rest in peace.” That’s what my mom and dad said. And I often thought about it, like, in my way. Like, we want to know for sure what really happened to her; the whole story behind, you know, why and where and how. All those kind of things. And we just read it from a newspaper clipping. And I don’t know how true they are.
Even that, like, people didn’t understand in those days; in the ‘70s. Probably my parents didn’t understand also that we should talk about an issue or open up a case and that kind of stuff. But I’m glad that we are -- are here today to discuss the situation. First, I really didn’t want to talk about it because I thought of my mom and dad what -- what they had said. But I know deep down in my heart that I want to know the truth. I want to know what really happened to my sister, know why she had died.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Christine can you share about how you were able to reconnect with your family.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Okay. I -- so when my mom adopted me a medication bottle came with me and they were never to know my history, like, where I come from or who’s my biological family. But on that medication bottle was my last name, Dantouze. So my adopted mother took that off that bottle and put it in her pocket before the social worker could take that away from her. So she kept that name, Dantouze, in her mind my whole life growing up. She never told me but she said afterwards that she would have told me if I had asked.

So what happened is she applied -- life carried on, I was doing my own thing, I had a daughter and -- and then my mom applied to Indian and Northern Affairs to see if I had any treaty rights and if I was
status. And I was. I belonged to Northlands Band and even my daughter was on there. Like, okay, how did that happen? But it did. And -- so the Indian and Northern Affairs sent a package to us stating my rights as a status Indian. And I -- it said in there that my education could be paid for. So I was in my twenties. I was about 20 when I found out this information. I didn’t know what it meant. It said I was a number. So I made a joke that, “Oh, okay, I’m a number.” Because that’s what it said to -- in the package; to Indian and Northern Affairs you’re this number to your band. I was like, okay, yeah. That’s interesting.

So I called there because I wanted to go to school and I wanted to see what my process was to -- to get some -- to apply for education, right. And nobody knew what to -- to do with my call because I’m adopted child. So they don’t know in the Band office what to -- who to forward me to. So I talked to quite a few people. And then they said to talk to the chief. And the chief ended up being my -- my uncle. So that’s when -- that’s when he finds out who was adopted out. He went and asked, again, my mom’s friends and they told him the babies name was Christine and my birth date. And I was like, “Okay.” I was really shocked, I didn’t expect to find family. I don’t know what -- I just wanted to go to school. By the way, I ended up going to school, so that was good.
But yeah -- and that’s when I found my family and went really fast after that. I met everybody and it was a really great meeting. Like, it was so awesome. Like, I flew into the community and it -- when I was looking out the plane it looked like the whole community came out to meet me. It was so -- like, it probably wasn’t the whole community but it really looked like it from my perspective, right. So, yeah, it was -- it was really amazing meeting my grandparents for the first time and my whole family. And I was just meant to know them because it came to me. And everything -- what happens happens for a reason. So I -- I was meant to know them, meet them. I also met my biological father. Again, by accident, but meant to happen. And my biological grandmother and aunt, also met them and a couple of sisters on that side. So it was -- it was okay.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** How old were you when you -- like, at what age were you when you when you were reconnecting?

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Twenty-three. I was 23 when I found my biological family. Little bit older than my mom when she was murdered. You know, if I think about that, I look at my children right now and one’s 22 and one’s 19. And she was a child, like, right. Twenty-one, that’s so young. I can’t -- she’s just a -- that’s
how young, like, I -- I can’t even comprehend that for her
to be on her own, living in the city and -- and then to be
taken. So young and naïve.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Susan, before when we
were talking, you were mentioning about how you act towards
your daughters and feelings you have towards them. Can you
explain that a little bit?

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: Yes. Today, I know
that a lot of young people like drinking, going out, going
to places, meeting people that they don’t know. When I
know that my daughter is in town and, kind of, don’t know
where she is I get really scared. I feel really jumpy. I
really need to find out where she is, what she’s doing at
that moment because the memories always fall back to my
late sister. You know, drinking, not knowing people she’s
hanging around with, doing whatever they want. And it’s so
scary.

I like to share something about when I go to
Winnipeg. What the cops said to us, my sister might have
gotten a ride with a stranger. And this happened at the
Balmoral Hotel. And every time I go to Winnipeg, when I
see the Balmoral Hotel, oh, it just -- I don’t like it. It
just scares me. I don’t even want to be there let alone
look at, see it. Anger, that’s what I have and scared.
And when I hear about that Transcona Highway, Transcona
that -- that scares me too. Always brings back that memory. If I get on the bus to Winnipeg from Thomson, going to Winnipeg, when I see the city, first moment -- first thought I have is about my sister; my sister died here. And I don’t really want to be there type of thing. But I guess I have to get adjusted to it because I can’t -- I can’t forget about it, it’s always with me every time I see the city of Winnipeg. I get scared.

And there’s something else that I’d like to share. I’m sure that you’ve heard about the book about April Raintree, In Search of April Raintree. And that book always reminds about my late sister, how she used to be. Like, one was different, those girls. And my sister went the other way. That’s what I thought. And -- and Christine just told me yesterday about when she met her father that they had a house on Jarvis Avenue and -- and in that -- In Search of April Raintree, the book, it said they had a house on Jarvis Avenue. Like, it all -- like, connecting. Things are connecting. Yeah, so --

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Susan, I don’t think Commissioner Audette has read the book and probably not a lot people in the room. Can you just explain this -- a bit about the story of -- of the story, In Search of April Raintree?

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: In Search of April
Raintree is about a story of two sisters, if I can recall. And they had different lives. They were both Metis -- Metis children. One was acting like a -- a Native person and the other girl wanted to be in -- in the white society. She wanted to be like a white girl or whatever. And then -- and therefore they were not connecting. And I think one of the girls died in that story. I think the one that wanted to be like a white person, that girl died. And so therefore, that story always reminds me of my sister. And when she said they live on Jarvis Avenue I was kind of shocked. Like, you know -- oh wow. So, I don’t know what else to say.

**MS. SHELBY THOMAS:** Christine, can you explain in a little more detail what it was like growing up in a -- a white home?

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** When I was living in -- in my adopted home my parents were good to me growing up. It was the kids that weren’t. To this day, no connection. But to this day also, no real connection with -- not that unconditional love that I feel for my children. That connection that you have with children, I never felt that. Not ever, not from parents. You just see the difference too. And the -- where I went to school and stuff the way the kids treated you, like -- my parents took in a lot of foster children, mostly Native children. And
so you were just another one of the Indian kids, right, in that community. Like, you weren’t -- they taunt you and call you names and stuff. You are never connected. Not -- not in white communities, like -- and to this day you still see it. Like, I see it. It’s -- the racism is bad. Like -- and you see it all the time. And the effects of that on me is anger; angry for all the racism that I had to endure. I mean, like -- I don’t -- affects -- it affected my jobs; working along another race. When you’re a child and you’re faced with that daily it doesn’t do any good on you as a person. It affects you. You live with it, it makes you angry. You have to work on yourself, you have to heal, you have to let it go. You have to -- you have to build your own self-worth and your own self esteem because they broke it. The government broke -- the government broke my mom putting her in residential school, then broke her a little bit more for adopting me out and then broke me because I had to live with it. Like, how much can one family go through. I mean, my mom could have been a family. I believe that if -- if they didn’t adopt me out she’d be alive. We probably would have went back to Lac.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Susan and Christine, do you have any ideas of what needs to change in our society so that the racism and these experienced -- experiences stop?
MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: For a long time -- I’ve been thinking and thinking about this for a long time. The woman who are in society today and men, they need to watch themselves. They need to know what they’re doing at a certain time and moment in their lives. I think they need to watch each other’s back; the one forward and the one backward, in the back. They need to really watch themselves so something this tragic don’t happen. Like, some girls still go out, talk to strangers, people they don’t even know. They need to take care of their families, where they come from. Listen to what your elders tell you or what your brother or your sister is trying to tell you. They need to listen to that.

Also, in the schools, I was just thinking about the seven sacred teachings needs to be implemented in the schools so everybody is aware of what humility means, what respect means. Maybe they don’t know. Maybe that’s why they don’t listen. But if it’s incorporated in the health program, like -- they say this humility and all of this, it’s not Native problems. This -- the white society needs to learn about these seven grandfathered teachings. What it means in depth. Maybe examples of what it really means. I think the school needs to -- to start teaching that. Maybe they don’t know. Maybe they don’t understand. But I think everybody in Canada needs to know how to treat
one another. Yeah, to understand one another, where
they’re coming from and why things happen the way they do.
Because we’re different people, we -- we have different
learnings, teachings. But the seven sacred teachings,
grandfather teachings needs to be implemented in the
schools. Or if the teachers, they don’t understand it
maybe they got to learn too or elders to come to the school
and teach them. They need to have more elder teachings in
the schools, people coming in, learning from their
experiences because they lived that life already so they
understand already.

That’s what I would recommend is the woman
please keep an eye on yourselves. Look out for yourselves,
what you’re doing. Make the right choices, make the right
decisions. Don’t let other people take you astray. You
know, somebody might say, “Let’s go there, let’s go there.”
Don’t do that. Think about it before you go if you don’t
know where you’re going. So if all the ladies and men and
women can listen, please follow that. That’s what I want
to say. Please watch your backs. Look out for each other.

If somebody needs support talk to them,
maybe give them advice or how things -- or -- or go for
help, some kind of help because it’s out there, it’s
available. If you don’t ask for help how do you know that
somebody -- you need help. There’s a lot of AA programs
that they can go to. People can help them out if they ask. And the society says that we can’t help you because you don’t ask for it. So people need to start asking for help and looking out for yourself. Maybe that way that things don’t repeat itself. Because it’s not a good feeling when -- when somebody in your family has been taken away by somebody else. It lives with you forever. You never forget.

When November comes around every year, oh, I feel the hurt and I feel it in my heart. This is the month that is going to be sad for me, I know that. And when the day comes, I cry because that’s the day my sister died. And I’ll never ever see her again. But it’s happened a long time ago. I mean, it’s still in my heart but some of it I -- I’ve learned to let go. Because no matter how angry or how sad I am, how many words I’ve said that’s going to hurt other’s feelings, I know in my heart that she not going to come back. She’s gone the spirit world now and we got to leave her there. So please, women, please look after yourselves. Know where you are at all times, what you’re doing, what your plans are. Nobody going to do it for you, you got to do it yourself.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Commissioner Audette, do you have any questions?

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: Oui, Me
Thomas, I hear myself. You talked about elders and my
grandmother was very important very -- she was short, but
very powerful. So it is normal for me that when I travel
and receive the truth from families and survivors I ask
people from the land to sit with us so I have beautiful
Kokum’s. So if you want to say something before I ask my
question.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

COMMISSIONER MICHELÉ AUDETTE: Oui. Yes, of
course. In 19 -- in the ‘70s was -- Susan, you mentioned
that you -- your family heard from a third party that your
sister was killed or she was dead. So it was the church,
it was the priest?

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: Yes, that came from the
priest that was living in Brochet right at that time. He
was -- how do you say that word -- mediator.

COMMISSIONER MICHELÉ AUDETTE: Okay.

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: Yeah, mediator. Yeah.

COMMISSIONER MICHELÉ AUDETTE: Mediator for
what?

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: For the community.

Like, everything went through him; a spokesperson for the
people.

COMMISSIONER MICHELÉ AUDETTE: Okay.

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: And he resided at -- at
the -- in the community with the people. He did the services, he did the baptisms. He -- when all the kids had their birthdates, what year they were going to go to residential school, he kept all those records. When people were married, he married them. He did the burials, everything, the priest there. Yeah.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: And how long it was like that that he was a spokesperson or the church, the representative from the church?

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: He did that all his life, all the time that he was staying there until the Band, Northlands Band -- or Bearlands Band had the chief and counsel and that started existing in maybe 1969 -- '68. And that’s when they were developed.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: But you mentioned that you would have like that the police explained to you instead of third person. Is that what I understood?

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: Yes.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Okay.

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: And --

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: The police should have come to our house and told us instead of saying to the minister that the -- the killer was caught. I don’t know
why he -- they had to go through him.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: M’hm.

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: They could have came over because me and my sister, we already understand English at that time, my older sister.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Yeah.

MS. SUSAN CLIPPING: She went to residential school too and she understood Cree too. She understood Dene, Cree and English. And she could interpret and -- smart lady. But they had to go through the priest to give us that information. Maybe that’s for guidance, maybe. I don’t know.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Merci Beaucoup, Susan and thank you for your wisdom and your recommendation. And, Christine, you mentioned that in your own family -- it’s probably my weaks (sic) -- just in my family, we have many trauma’s or many tragedy -- tragèdie.

MS. CHRISTINE MERAHY: M’hui.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Residential schools, your mom took -- they took away her identity and then her self-esteem. They took away her daughter. And you today growing up without a mom, what would you say to the government? Today you have that chance and we have -- I say, we have the obligation to teach the Canadian about what happened to so many of our women and girls, our men
and boys. And still today in 2018. And we have, you were
asking, Agnes, what is our role. It’s also to -- to write
a report. A report with call for actions or
recommendation. How should we do things differently this
time so Canada is a safer place for you and our children.
And it’s not a third person who will come and say what
happened to my loved one. And if I ask question can you
feed me on the research or investigation. That we have
those rights. That we are treated equally. So that’s one
of our many mandates because the question was asked before
we start. So what would you say? What would you --

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: Maintain the
family -- maintain the family. Don’t break up the family.
Look to the family. Like, if -- my mom was young, she was
18, 19, 20 -- like, she had me when she was 18, she’s
murdered when she’s 21. So if there’s anything that can be
done today, 2018, should have been done then, but, today,
go to the family, take the child back to the family. Work
with the family, work with the parents and the kids
together. Don’t separate them. You’re doing more harm
than you are good separating the family.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Merci.

Merci. And what do you say to us and the government --
us -- we’re the tool to write that report. But very
passionate and also that they took away your culture, your
identity, that was powerful statement.

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: That was very powerful. But what do we say? What do we demand or ask?

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: We’re the first peoples of this land. Maintain our culture. Maintain our life, right.

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: Yes.

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: I didn’t get that chance. I didn’t get that chance. But today we could for everybody. It should be -- so much time was put into us learning English and French culture, a lot of time, centuries, right, years. So many years.

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: 150 years.

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: Okay. There you go. There -- that’s how long. Make change now. Learn our language. Help us maintain our language. Help us maintain our culture. It’s important. We’re not -- we’re Dene, we have a language, we have a culture. We should have a right to have it, to keep it. And the government should recognize that and do all that they can to maintain it.

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: Yeah.

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: Not continue to strip us of it.

COMMISSIONER MICHELE AUDETTE: Yeah. You
said Dene?

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Dene.

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Okay. Short and sweet, there’s a beautiful relationship with my auntie and your nation.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Oh.

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** The elders met with our elders from Schefferville --

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** M’hm.

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** -- and with your nation, and the two groups create a -- a book about the caribou.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Oh.

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Yes.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Nice.

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Yes. And it says there, even before 150 years ago they were so may attemption (sic) to take away our identity. So -- but we’re been there for thousands of years so we will continue. I hope that you’re connected. I can see. But for you and your children connected because this is who we are.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Yeah.

**COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE:** Our identity is the foundation. That’s how I survive today.
MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: And surrounded by amazing women across Canada. So I’d like to ask if our elders have few words for you.

MS. DARLENE OSBORNE: Excuse me. Well, thank you very much for your -- for your story. And I’m sorry about you being robbed with your identity and your culture and your language. That almost happened to my sister, my younger sister when she went and had her baby in Winnipeg in Misericordia Hospital. And this was in 1978. And when she went and had her baby there she called us and she called me and said, “You know -- you know, sister, you know what they’re trying to do me? They’re trying to get me to sign papers so they can keep the baby for a while because I’m too young to be a mother.” And I said, “Oh -- oh my gosh.” And then so my parents were still living and then lucky I -- I had English in me and I -- I told my parents, I said, “You know, mom, dad, Elizabeth just called me.” I said, “Those doctors and those nurses -- and those were the nuns that looked after Misericordia. And then I said, “Mom, dad, you know what they’re trying to do to Elizabeth. They’re trying to force her to sign a form so she can give up her baby.” And in that time, you know, my -- we didn’t have very much money and then my dad said, “Okay, you know, I got money. I want you to leave in the
morning. And I want you to go and stay with your sister until she’s ready to come home.” And in those days the mother had to stay in the hospital for maybe a week in order for her to bring her baby home. So I -- I left and I was 19, 20 years old already. So I left and I just took a cab right there. I didn’t even bother going to the hotel. And my brother was already living in Winnipeg so I just went there and I -- and then I -- I was kind of angry. And then I said to the nurse, I said, “I want to see the doctor. Who’s doctor is my sister?” So the doctor came -- came along and said, “How dare you. What are you trying to do? Are you trying to force my sister to sign these forms so she can give up her baby?” I said, “That baby’s no puppy,” I said. I said, “I’m going to take her home.” And so we -- I sat there, I called my brother. My brother came and sat with me and we didn’t -- I didn’t budge. I stayed in the hospital with my sister. And I said, “I don’t ever want you to do that to my sister.” And today my -- my niece is 39 years old already. And I was -- I guess I was very lucky because I was very vocal already. And -- and especially my mom and dad, you know, they -- they were angry. But a lot of -- my sister-in-law went through the same thing. Same thing, but her son got taken away and he got transferred to Tennessee. And the same story you’re telling is the same thing that he had to go through. We
had him back about 15 years now. And he’s living back home
in the north where he belongs. And -- but I know that he’s
starting to ask questions. He knows his grandparents,
sadly, that his granny passed away before he -- he arrived.
And -- but the family are there. And so many children and
what you had to go through losing your mom. But, you know,
your mom is in the spirit world. I -- I believe that. And
I just want you to get to know your -- your family there.
They’re beautiful people. (Indiscerible).

COMMISSIONER MICHÈLE AUDETTE: Merci --

merci.

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: You remind -- you
reminded me of something when you were sharing. And when I
was given up for adoption my adopted parents received five
pictures and they picked me. So when you said, my niece is
not a puppy, I was. Just kidding. No. But that’s how
they did it. They sent them five pictures and they picked
me out of that five. I wanted to share that.

MS. ISABELLE MORIS: Masi cho. Masi cho. I
have Dene grandchildren also. She knows -- she knows them.
Yeah. Yes. They’re beautiful. She -- she’ll tell -- tell
you which ones, your cousin. Yeah. Yeah, that’s a shame
the way to hear that what happened to you. And they call
it ‘60s scoops. You know what, it was way beyond that.
And it had -- it was happening in the ‘70s too. I say that
because I was sent here to go to high school. And then I
met this -- this Ojibway man that I’m still with to this
day. So anyways, I was an unwed mom at the age of 17 when
I had my son. And I was at Grace Hospital at that time.
And I -- my husband -- I’m -- I’m not going to say his
name. Nobody’s going to know his name. But anyways, I
said -- I told him, I said, “Come and visit me.” Like, he
was working at that time. I was in the city here. And I
had to go all the way to Grace Hospital to give birth to my
son. So anyways, I said, “Come and -- come and visit me.”
I said, “This lady keeps coming to my room and asking me,
do you want to give up your baby? You want to give up your
baby?” And she kept coming in there continuously. Like,
oh my God, what’s happening here. Because my family were
up north, right. And I’m always -- I’m -- I was a unwed
mom and I’m 17, right. So therefore this, you know -- I --
I thought about it. But anyways, my -- my -- my common-
law, back then, came and his family started coming,
visiting me, right. So they, like, you know -- they kept
us -- they kept women in the hospital long, right. A whole
week.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** Yeah.

**MS. ISABELLE MORIS:** Yeah. So, you know,
yeah. It was -- it’s way beyond ‘70s. And I bet you it’s
still happening to this day. Like, you know. Yeah. And I
worked in a hospital -- Thompson. You know, we’re always working under the policies and stuff like that. And keep quiet and shut your mouth and not say nothing. Confidentiality’s important, yeah. We see a lot.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** M’hm.

**MS. ISABELLE MORIS:** So anyways, I will not go there. So yeah, it was happening. So my -- my son probably would have been in the States and I probably would have gone through that process that you have gone through. And I wouldn’t have never -- never known my -- my own son, right. But anyways. It was the result of the Constitution to, like, you know, the Indian -- Indian Act that made -- played a role back then where if we -- we marry a -- a -- like, I remember, my husband or common-law, he -- he wanted to marry me and I said, “No, I can’t marry you, I’m going to lose my treaty.” And then my -- my -- my baby won’t be treaty, right.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** M’hm.

**MS. ISABELLE MORIS:** So at least knew that part. And then 1980 when it became, you know, that Queen and Elliot Trudeau had signed the Constitution, right. Oh, I was so happy. All right, now I can get married and -- but -- but anyways, that’s the thing, like, a -- a lot of that -- those issues, you know, it was -- it took women -- it took the women to make those changes, to stand up
together and the First Nation’s people. And that’s what it takes, for people to stand together.

**MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY:** M’hm.

**MS. ISABELLE MORIS:** Yeah. To make those changes and that’s took. But anyways, I’m still with my -- my husband to this day and we have grandchildren, we have Dene grandchildren. It’s my oldest son that is giving us Dene grandchildren. They’re so cute and loveable. Okay.

**REV. AGNES SPENCE:** Yeah. I want to thank you for your story because it hit’s right at home. I have five family members that were stolen. I had a sister, my mother’s youngest daughter, had a heart murmur and had to be kept in the hospital at The Pas. And she disappeared. My mom spent most of the rest of her life trying to find her. Finally, she made it home when she was 18. I had an auntie who had TB. She went to the sanatorium, hospital. She was there for two years and her children were taken care at the hospital. When she came back she never got her children back and she spent at least 50 years looking for her children. One of them came home. But the girl, her name is Susan, never made it home. And she would have been around my age. And then my sister’s. My oldest sister, she had a baby when she was 19. She delivered the baby in the hospital in The Pas. The nuns walked in, took the baby because she was under age at that time. She was 19. The
age of maturity was 21. They took the baby away. And she never found the baby until he -- he was grown up. I guess he was -- he was -- he grew up in the States. And that’s where he came to visit family. And then we have another -- my other sister, she was 16. She had a baby at the same hospital. Same thing, the nurse walk -- the nuns walked in after the delivery and took her away. Her name was Shirley (ph). My sister’s -- my sister died of a broken heart, never found her child. Shirley has yet to make it home. But still, deep in my heart, if Shirley ever makes it home, we know that she was loved by her mother and cherished in the hearts of the grandparents and the great-grandparents and so many of us family. But I want you to know that you are not alone. And we thank you for your story. Hai-hai.

**MS. FLORENCE CATCHEWAY:** My -- my first time I’m going to share this story. I -- I went to a meeting in Toronto about two months ago. And four o’clock in the morning the grandmothers came to me and they talked to me and they told me the -- the ladies that passed on, the other side of life, they have a good life. And please, tell the staff just to be positive and do their work. And I didn’t have a chance to share with the staff that were sent home early. It was kind of sad. But I’m glad I’m back here. And thanks for your story. Stories are good. And thank you.
COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Merci.

Merci. We -- we -- we would like to -- oh yeah, you, of course you can stand up. We would like to know if you would accept a gift from us; a beautiful gift.

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: Of course.

COMMISSIONER MICHELLE AUDETTE: Eagle feather and of course, there is seeds and I added some Labrador Tea since we have a connection, my auntie and your people.

MS. CHRISTINE MERASTY: Thank you.

MS. SHELBY THOMAS: Commissioner Audette, can we adjourn the hearings portion of the Thompson community hearings?

--- Exhibits (code: P01P14P0203)

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

--- Upon adjourning at 5:11 p.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

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

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Julia Hehn

May 7, 2018