National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Truth-Gathering Process

Part 1 Public Hearings

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Public Volume 84

Joni Michele Guerin

Heard by Commissioner Michèle Audette

Commission Counsel: Breen Ouellette

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MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Thank you, Commissioner Audette.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: I would like to introduce Kim Barrett. Kim is probably well-known to many people in the room. She is an amazing leader, an amazing Coast Salish leader, a Coast Salish sister, and a very dear friend and a warrior, and I’m very happy to have her sitting beside me.

Leah Gazan is my sister in spirit, and she’s an amazing leader as well. She fights really hard for our rights and for our women. She’s Dakota, lives in Winnipeg, which I’d say is the epicentre of where a lot of sadness is.

So I’m very honoured to have both of them here beside me to give me strength and support.

Thank you.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Michele has requested to affirm using an eagle feather.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Great. Good afternoon, Michele. You can stay seated. It’s fine.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Oh, okay.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: It’s not that formal.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Okay.
MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: I’ll pass you the eagle feather though.

Michele, do you solemnly affirm to tell your truth in a good way this afternoon?

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Yes, I do.

MR. BRYAN ZANDBERG: Thank you.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: Commissioner Audette, Michele has prepared a statement which she would like to present to you.

Would you please begin when you’re ready.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: (Speaking in Musqueam language).

My name is Michele Guerin; my traditional name is Skalusat (phonetic), and I’m from Musqueam and I’m happy to be here today.

Today I am here to speak. I’m the proud daughter of the late Beverly Guerin. And today I dedicate my testimony to my mom and I will speak for both of us about how the system stole our relationship.

The name Skalusat was given to me in a naming ceremony held in our longhouse. My family elders chose the name for me. I’m eligible to hold this name because my grandmother Gertie Guerin was from Squamish Nation and my grandfather Victor Guerin was from Musqueam.

According to our history Skaluse (phonetic)
Joni Michele Guerin was a warrior who guarded Howe Sound and was the first of our people to learn how to write. My family chose this name for me because I am the first lawyer in the Guerin family. More importantly, in 2017 I incorporated as a freelance writer so I’m also the first writer in our family. And as I have prepared this testimony I realized – I came to the conclusion that I have to own all of my name so that makes me a warrior as well, and I do share the name Skaluse with my son Terry Sparrow Junior.

I don’t like the spotlight, preferring to let others do the talking, but this time it’s different, this is my story. And ever since the announcement of the inquiry I felt deeply compared to share my story with the Commission. And like others who’ve testified I’ve relived a great deal of pain to stand here today, sit here today.

And an important part of the preparation was that I ask some of the strongest leaders in my circle to support me. They stand behind me today. Some are here in persons others are here in spirit lifting me up in their prayers, and I’m extremely grateful for their strength and support because I know I’ll need it.

Today I offer my testimony as a survivor. I was apprehended in 1963 during the ‘60s scoop, taken from my mother’s arms right out of the hospital.

In 1979 my first son Keith Sparrow was
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apprehended right out of the hospital out of my arms. He remained in foster care for one month before he was returned to his father and I. Then Keith died of crib death two months later.

In 1985 my three children Victoria, Joanie and Terry Sparrow were apprehended. It took me approximately five days to get them back.

In 2012 they came for my granddaughter Tatum Rain (phonetic). I was a lawyer by then and I said “Back the fuck up”.

This is part of my story I want to share today. I was apprehended, my first baby was apprehended, my three kids were apprehended, and then they threatened to apprehend my granddaughter.

I should point out that I use the word “fuck” a lot to express myself, a lot, and it bothers people, a lot of people, and I know this because they tell me. And when someone says to you “I don’t like when you swear or when you use the word fuck” it takes a great deal of willpower not to say “Well fuck off then.”

I even wrote an op-ed piece published in the *Vancouver Sun* about the use of the word, and my wise friend Rebecca reminded me just how I expressed myself. Sometimes I’ve wondered if I express myself like that because of the deep anger I have at a system that fucked with my life.
In the past I’ve tried using other words but they didn’t carry the same weight to convey my feelings, that is until very recently. A few weeks ago my friend used an expression that could possibly replace the word in my vocabulary. I had just told him something incredible and he simply said “Good Lord”. Good Lord, so simple, and I loved it.

So during my testimony today whenever I say the phrase “Good Lord” you’ll know what I really mean. So thanks Sheldon.

So good Lord I’ve spent a lot of time considering whether to testify or not. One reason I hesitated is because I spent years putting all these memories behind me. Testifying meant revisiting extremely painful memories and then trying to find the right words to be able to publicly share those experiences.

This past year I’ve spent many moments doubled over in pain, sobbing, recalling these events, reviewing my Ministry file, and challenging myself to search for words to share with the Commission and the public.

The foster care system failed to protect me, worse nothing has changed since I was a 14 year old living on the street. Forty (40) years later the system continues to fail Indigenous girls and women.
I was absolutely outraged at the acquittal of Tina Fontaine’s murderer, but it did fuel my motivation. I should also note that I tend to cry when I speak from my heart. It’s a condition I call I have a pretty soft heart. Ask anybody who knows me. But my friend Judge Harry Slade taught me a trick to stop tears and I expect I’ll use that trick a lot today. You see, Judge Harry Slade is my mentor’s mentor, and my mentor is Gary Absley (phonetic). I’m always amazed to be blessed with such amazing people in my life.

I also want to point out this necklace. I’ve been wearing this necklace every day for at least 10 years. I had it custom made. It’s engraved with the words “Sometimes there’s just not enough rocks”. It’s a line from the movie Forrest Gump actually, and it’s from the scene when Forrest and Jenny return to the house where Jenny grew up as a little girl where she was sexually abused. In the scene Jenny picks up rock, after rock, after rock crying angrily, and she’s throwing them at the house. She continues throwing rocks until she lays on the ground sobbing. And Forrest sits beside her on the ground and simply says “Sometimes there’s just not enough rocks”. I cried, and I cried, and I cried the first time I watched the scene because it was such a true statement.

It’s also important to me that I clarify
terms that I’ll use today. When I use the term “mom” I’m referring to my biological mother Bev Guerin. When talking about my foster mother I will call her Joyce. I want to show mom, my mom, the most respect possible, and it is not meant to disrespect my foster mother Joyce. I’ve called Joyce mom all my life and Joyce won’t mind at all.

And when talking about my foster father I will call him dad because he’s the only father I knew. My biological father’s name was Earl Miller. I never met him. The only way I learned about him was through my Ministry file after I did a Freedom of Information Act request, and I suppose they expected that I knew his name so they didn’t redact it.

Earl was a bartender at the St. Alice Hotel in North Vancouver, and I’m very proud of that fact because North Van is my home now, plus my husband Gary and I are confident our fathers knew each other very well.

I was apprehended during the ‘60s scoop right out of the hospital at 10 days old. The first document in my file is my apprehension order, and I believe you have a copy of it. I believe I was apprehended for the simple reason that mom was Indigenous. She was 25 years old, she held a job, and she would have been a great single mother. She was dating my biological dad at the time.
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25 year old Indigenous single female, a grade 12 graduate, with additional training in a commercial course, employed for three years as a typist with Sandwell Company, which was an engineering firm. But the apprehension order states that I was apprehended on the 29th of January 1963 as a child in need of protection by reason of having no parent capable of exercising proper parental control.

I also have prepared a chronology that you have of my file that I just wanted to quickly walk through. And I did this really to honour my mom. And so I’ll just quickly go through it.

And you can see on the first page there’s a number of letters -- well there’s copies of the apprehension order, the presentation order when I was presented to court. There’s letters that went to my mom requesting visits in February of ’63. All through the year of ’63 there was several letters and notifications that went to my mom setting out that they were going to seek apprehending me and asking for home visits and so forth. Mom was served an affidavit on March 26th that there would be an application by the Catholic Children’s Aid to commit me into the care and custody of the Society because I as in need of protection. There the order of committal was April 23rd, ’63, and that was when I became an official ward of the government. And I just noted is that like a birthday
or something I should celebrate. I don’t know. But then just walk through the different letters that they continued to send to her.

And they also include home visits they made with my foster family. So, for example, in August 1963 -- I was born in January -- Joyce, my foster mom, was expecting a baby within a month and the social worker asked my foster family if they wanted to move me to another home because she was going to have another baby and they refused. There were several letters -- most of the letters to my mom were asking have you made any decision now about baby Joni and they just continued to give my age.

There’s a note -- in March 1964 the report says that it’s still a temporary placement. The social worker report notes that mom’s plans to keep me didn’t work out and mom disappeared without signing consents. So I don’t know what my mom’s plans were. There’s nothing in the file that indicates what those plans might have been. They didn’t make any notation of that.

In August and September of 1964 you’ll have copies of some ads that were placed in the Vancouver Sun and Province and the ads said will anyone knowing the whereabouts of Beverly Joan Guerin, mother of Joni Michele Guerin contact a certain box office number -- a box number. The first ad resulted with nobody responding
but the second ad they placed they had three replies, one was anonymous. I think it was my grandpa, if I could tell by his writing. It’s so cute. The other one was my grandma Gertie. And then they had a phone call from John Edwards, who my mom was now in a relationship with.

So they found she was living in a house in North Vancouver. They asked for meetings. In September it states that after meeting with my mom she stated her desire that she wanted me returned and it says that they advised mom who to contact at family court; it includes that court will require a home visit with mom and John Edwards, who she was living with, and that the judge will decide based on evidence.

September ’64 they did a home visit to my foster family and the note just says “Michele is of good strong build”. I thought that was funny. Like it looks like she’ll be able to haul a lot of fish. Like strong build, what does that mean?

In December ’64 my mom asked for me to visit at Christmas. The social worker advised her that that was impossible. Again my mom stated that she wants me back. They note that there was a planning conference with five social workers that day. And then the rest of the report is redacted.

In January ’65 my mom made an application
Joni Michele Guerin

again for my return. She was now living common law with
John Edwards in North Van and had a three month old baby
boy Leslie.

There’s a letter in January ’65 that the
Catholic Children’s Aid sent to the Northbound Social
Welfare Department requesting a social worker to do a home
visit. And you have a copy of that. It’s numbered 3A.
But the letter states that mom disappeared until the ads
were run in the paper, and one of the responses was from my
grandmother Guerin asking specifically to be contacted
because she said she had concerns over my mom’s desire to
have me back. The rest of the paragraph there is redacted
and I expect that the rest of that paragraph probably
outlined my grandmother’s concerns.

The social worker notes that in view of Ms.
Guerin’s -- my mom -- limited involvement over the past two
years were naturally dependent on your assessment -- the
social worker’s assessment -- of her capacity to provide a
good home for the child. And I just thought that sounded
fishy.

So they came -- the social workers that came
to the foster family and noted that Michele is so much a
part of the family it will be difficult for them to give
her up. The report notes there’s a definite possibility I
may be returned as mom made the application in court and a
court date was set for March 30th. The social worker did do
the home visit in North Van and the entire letter is
redacted.

April 7th social worker visited the foster
family and advised that the hearing has been adjourned
because of mom’s current situation. I don’t know what the
situation would have been. And notes my foster parents
were anxious about my status.

April 12th 1965 again mom applies for my
return; a hearing was set for May. Again the judge
requested detailed information on the physical aspects of
mom’s home in North Van. So there was a home visit.

You have in number five is a May 27th letter
from the social worker to Catholic Children’s Aid reporting
on the home visit. It says the home was owned by my mom’s
uncle, occupied by mom, John Edwards, and baby Leslie,
who’s my brother. And then there’s another paragraph
redacted. And then it describes the furnishings, the heat
source, lighting, ventilation, and then a backroom that was
used for storage would be a bedroom for Joni, which is what
my name was, if I was returned, but there was no
recommendation included. And then the court was adjourned
to June 1st, 1965.

The next court order I see -- I saw was June
14th, ’65, which was my mom’s complaint, and again an
application for my return, and she was seeking temporary or
permanent return, and the court order hearing was set for
June 29th, 1965.

And then this is where absolutely everything
just disappears. In -- there’s -- after this two year
build up to this hearing and all these letters that had
gone to her, and all these home visits that she, you know,
accommodated, the file has absolutely zero information on
the result of that court hearing. It has -- there’s
nothing reported on the social worker -- you know, there’s
regular updates by the social workers all through the file
and there’s absolutely nothing about this outcome. So
between June 14th and November 1st, 1965 I have no idea what
happened.

Then the next report on November 1st, ’65 is
just the standard fluff that they reported, but these
quotes were in the report. It says “Michele was first
temporarily placed in this home but then the situation was
worked out and Michele is now on a long-term plan in this
home. The mother doesn’t want to sign adoption consent.”
And then in brackets “Seem mother’s file closed. The
adoption could be difficult to plan because of the above
mentioned problems” and then it’s competition between Rose
and I, who was my little foster sister, “and it might be a
good idea to place Michele in another foster home where
foster parents have adoption in view.”

So my questions were how was the situation worked out and when and why and when was my mom’s file closed. Like there’s no information about this.

And then even more ludicrous I thought was that they note what a loving foster family I’m in but then they propose to move me because a couple two year olds are competing for attention.

And the last page of this summary that I’m just going to walk through is the annual reports that -- the annual visits I had from social workers that met with me once a year throughout the years of 1966 to 1976 and most of these visits, from my recollection, were about five minutes long. They may have talked to my foster parents longer but in terms of contact with me.

So highlights from the annual visits by the social worker to Michele, and I just -- these are all in bullet form; Grammy Gertie Guerin is chief of Musqueam and she was on TV; Joyce tells Michele that is her grandma; foster home is a long-term warm home; another paragraph redacted. The report notes her mother did not ask for Michele and should never be encouraged. The next one is Michele is of at least average intelligence. That cracked me up, hashtag at least. Michele starts grade one at age five so not as in the same class as sister Rose. My first
report card was straight A’s. Sixty-eight (68) to 73 --
during the years ’68 to ’73 it says I continued to excel in
education. In 1973 Joyce very much at ease with Michele’s
history, able to answer questions with assurance and calm.
Michele asked if she could meet real mother. Joyce replied
when she was older. By virtue of the fact Michele almost
returned home three times, Joyce has a lot of information
on Michele’s mother and is able to give her the background
material she needs when she asks for it. And this wasn’t
ture at all. This just wasn’t true. I did ask if I could
meet my real mother and she did say when I’m older, but as
far as I knew she knew nothing about my biological family
other than what was read in the papers. So I don’t know
where they came up with this. And I certainly wasn’t
getting background material provided to me as I needed it.
But it did say this was a good secure placement, one of the
better foster homes. In ’73 impresses a secure well-
adjusted child, family would like to adopt. Social worker
suggests not to approach mom to seek her adoption consent
before the Supreme Court of Canada deals with status issues
for adopted Indian kids as it might encourage mom to apply
Certainly this is a well-adjusted child; 1975, happy secure
child grown tall and quite attractive; grade 7 excellent
school work; is well aware of her family background and has
good feelings about her culture; 76, now 13, very secure
and happy child; the Supreme Court of Canada decision,
adopted kids keep status; should transfer file to adoption
worker; talked to Joyce and Michele and they are willing to
go through process of adoption; family feels she is now
their own daughter and they don’t care if they get paid or
not. And then in November 22nd, 1976 there was a letter
that my mom’s sister Beryl Guerin sent to the Ministry
asking to meet Michele. And I’ll speak to that later.
There was also four pages of my file redacted. I have no
idea where within the file the four pages should -- where
they belonged or what information they contained. But it’s
those kinds of things that I found quite disturbing.

So as you can see the letters, forms, and
interdepartmental memos that I’ve reviewed contain a lot of
information I previously didn’t know, such as at the time
of my birth Earl Miller, my biological father, was 36 years
old and employed as a waiter at the St. Alice Hotel in
North Van where my mom lived for many, many years, and mom
was a typist at an engineering firm, and Earl had offered
to marry her. A note in the file said mom would consider
marriage if his attitude changed. I thought that was
pretty funny. Yet still the hospital discharge summary
form when I was discharged recommended adoptable. Good
Lord, like not temporary ward, not support the mom to
develop a plan to keep her daughter. I don’t know how they came to that conclusion in 10 days. There’s simply no evidence in the file, and I’ve read every line a million times. And the simple answer is they automatically deemed her incapable of being a good parent simply because she was Indigenous, and I became just another ’60 scoop baby stat.

And I want to be clear about my thoughts about the ‘60s scoop. Maybe the government was beginning the process to close residential schools down, but the ’60s scoop policy was the replacement. In other words, they continued coming onto our reserve taking us children. The only thing that had changed was that they sent us to middle class white families across the country. Some of those families were good, some bad, and some were horrific. And I was the lucky one I think.

On January 22nd, 1963 mom signed a consent to non-ward care form giving permission for two things, for me to receive any necessary medical care, and for me to be baptized Roman Catholic.

A bit of back history. Mom had already had one baby out of wedlock. Exactly two years earlier, January 20th, 1961 my older brother Daryl was born. However, my grandmother Gertie Guerin was the first woman elected chief in Musqueam and one of the first women elected chief in Canada. They called her the Old War
Joni Michele Guerin

Hearing - Public

1 Horse. But she was also a devout Catholic and didn’t want her unwed daughter raising a baby so she legally adopted Daryl as her son.

2 Then I was born in 1963. So Grandma Guerin didn’t want to help mom make a plan to keep me, at least that’s my assumption. She was embarrassed her daughter was pregnant out of wedlock, and that’s my view, and I’ll come back to that later in my testimony.

3 So at 10 days old I arrived at my foster parents’ home in New Westminster. Joyce and dad had been emergency foster parents for several years. Their job was to take in children, usually babies, on an emergency basis and until an adopting family was found for the child. So there was always a crib in the dining room for years for that reason.

4 Joyce and dad had four boys and one girl of their own then decided they wanted a girl playmate for my foster sister. They notified the Ministry they wanted to adopt the next baby girl who came into their care, also noting that nationality was not an issue. I arrived at 10 days old. Then Joyce found out that she was three months pregnant with my sister Rose but they kept me anyway. So I grew up with four foster brothers and two foster sisters. Joyce and dad also decided to call me by my middle name Michele and I used their surname for 14 years -- the 14
years I lived with them.

As far back as I can remember I understood I was their foster child. I was told my legal name was Joni Guerin, I was Indian, and one day I might be returned to my mom in Musqueam. My foster parents had to tell me because mom wouldn’t sign the adoption papers. The Ministry had to do some work to find her, and this is where that ad was placed in the *Vancouver Sun* in the province in 1964. And it’s at number two in your papers.

One of my first memories as a child was being sexually abused by a next door neighbour.

And you can put that photo up. There’s a photo of myself and my sister. There you go.

So one of my first memories as a child was being sexually abused by a next door neighbour. His name was Eric Lada. He also received a New Westminster Citizen of the Year Award one year. Daily he would expose himself to my sisters and I from the back porch. We were like two, three, and four years old.

I do want to take a moment to honour my sister Rose and my other estranged sister, who I won’t mention her name because I don’t have her permission, but together we shared this horrible experience together and sadly I know it happens to all girls everywhere.

Mr. Lada had the most beautiful garden.
Kids and neighbours loved walking through his garden path. It was amazing, huge dahlias, roses, everything. I believe it was the tool he used to gain the trust of our parents and to lure kids in.

Mr. Lada took this picture of Rose and I. He had just abused us that day. I don’t recall if it was the first time but we both remember the day vividly, including him taking the picture. He took us inside his basement while his wife quietly went upstairs and closed the kitchen door. Then he would put a hard candy on his penis and have me suck his penis until the candy was gone. Sometimes he put his finger just barely inside me or licked my vagina. What sickens me about the picture is I imagine him watching us grow up and just waiting and abiding his time to abuse us. He was a disgusting human being.

Joyce kept meticulous baby books of each of her children. One entry in my baby book at age three says “Michele has started screaming for no reason.” Around the same time Rose’s baby book notes that “Rose has stopped talking.” And Rose stopped talking until grade seven.

It’s painfully sad to think of how he took our innocence and our early childhood, and our different reactions make me think of the flight or fight response. I screamed she retreated.

This abuse went on until we were about 10
years old. It went on until I told my parents -- well, I
told Joyce. She overheard me referring to Mr. Lada as the
wiener man and asked me why I called him that. I said
"Because he always shows us his wiener and makes us do
stuff." She said she would talk to dad. She came back
later and hugged us and told us we were not to go over
there anymore and dad built a visual screen at the end of
our sundeck so we could no longer see into his yard. But
our parents didn’t ask us questions about what things he
did, they simply didn’t ask, and they didn’t report it to
the police, and they didn’t tell my social worker. Mind
you my social worker only visited once a year. I was about
nine or 10 years old when I told her -- when I told Joyce.

I’ve given a lot of thought as to why they
didn’t take any steps to alert authorities. That lack of
action caused a lot of work that we discussed later as
young women, my sisters and I. My take is that first Joyce
and dad are famous for sticking their head in the sand and
pretending everything is fine. That’s consistent with
their approach all their lives. Second, there wasn’t a lot
of public dialogue about reporting sexual abuse in those
days so that may be a reason. Third, my parents were
respectful of authority and perhaps Mr. Lada’s higher
position in the community intimidated them somehow.
Although I have no clue what he did for a living I just
know he was awarded New Westminster Citizen of the Year one year. And lastly, maybe they were afraid if my social worker found out that they would lose me. I don’t know. I’ll never know.

When I was about 11 a new friend moved into the neighbourhood with far more street smarts then my sisters and I. Actually she was Heiltsuk -- she was part Heiltsuk, which is so cool. So we went to Lada’s house with this friend and we had an intention to get him back somehow, so Lada did his usual and took us into the basement and removed his pants and our friend stole money out of Lada’s wallet. I believe it was a couple hundred bucks. He noticed immediately, got extremely angry, and threatened to call the police. Our friend said “Go ahead and call the police, we’ll wait.” He kicked us out with the money and we all went down to Shakey’s Pizza down the road and had a feast, and that’s what I call 10 year old vigilante justice.

There was also a used car lot at the end of our street. I lived off Kingsway in New West in Burnaby and Kingsway is full of used car lots. A salesman there sexually abused me from about the age of six to 10 years old. It happened a couple of times a week. I don’t remember how it happened the first time but it was a regular occurrence. He was probably about 35 years old.
He would call me into his office, close the blinds, lock his door, make me take my clothes off, and touch my body all over, and put his finger on my vagina rubbing it.

When I was about 10 and 11 years old in grade six and seven I was a crossing guard at our school, Our Lady of Mercy Elementary School. There were three crossing guards assigned to the intersection of 10th Avenue and Kingsway, which is an extremely busy intersection, a trucking route. A business owner on one of the corners would call me into his store and sexually abuse me during my tour of duty. His name was Jack. I can never get over why the teachers and supervisors never noticed a kid missing off one of the corners during our tour of duty that we took so seriously.

I also look at my granddaughter Tatum who is now 10 years old and I can’t even imagine if these things had happened to her by this age. Sadly I’m never shocked to learn about predators who prey on young children because I know they’re on every single corner in our neighbourhoods. They’re out there, because I’ve meat them.

I think of our parents saying “Just go outside and play” but this is what was happening when we were outside -- or when I was outside.

And Joyce was not an emotional mother, or rarely showed emotion, and that’s not meant as a criticism,
it was just my reality.

Our lives were very regimented. Dad had been a gunner in a tank in World War II, had been previously married to a woman who didn’t want kids and wouldn’t give him a divorce. When Joyce became pregnant, unable to get married, they left North Battleford and moved to B.C., then went on to have us seven kids. Our lives were extremely regimented, all about strict routine.

We lived very frugally. Meal planning adhered to Joyce’s strict budget, therefore the weekly menu never changed.

We were all taught from a young age to work very hard. We went with dad when he felled trees, helped as he split and chopped wood, and we stacked cord after cord of wood, it seemed never ending, but it was our primary source of heat in the winter.

We had regular chores. Joyce helped us with our homework. Dad had three jobs, one at Woodland School, he did maintenance at a trailer court in Langley, and he was a grave digger.

We all children had a paper route. In fact, the same paper route was handed down from my oldest foster brother, who’s 10 years my senior, to each kid in the family. Only two of us had more than one paper route. I had two paper routes because I’m a clothes horse. My
brother Eric had three.

Our allowance was 10 cents a week and we had to use the money we earned to contribute towards paying for our tuition at the private Catholic school that none of us wanted to attend.

But they also took us skiing every Friday night at Mount Seymour in the winter. We went for hikes like the Squamish chief or the black tusk or picnics in the summer on weekends. We also went camping for three weeks every summer.

In fairness, they had seven kids, often taking in an extra teen who needed temporary housing for one reason or another, but they didn’t invest time into our emotional needs. They thought by feeding us, housing us, and teaching us life skills that was the extent of their duty.

And then there was me with a lot of questions about my identity that were weighted with emotions. I had been sexually abused for so long, I felt so confused about my identity, and neither my parents or social worker spoke to me about my feelings ever.

As I said, from as far back as I can remember I was told my name was Joni Guerin and one day I might go back to my mom in Musqueam. For years I looked out the window wondering why my mom gave me up. And I
asked myself the same question a billion times, what does it mean to be an Indian, and I was fortunate, my foster parents made effort to teach me what they could.

Dad had grown up in North Battleford and most of his friends were Cree. I’m sure dad was mistaken as Cree many times. He was born in Belgium, had dark skin, with jet black hair, and had arrived in North Battleford as an immigrant family when he was two years old. I don’t think he was treated well at school. His father was a horticulturalist and got a job as the gardener for the North Battleford Saskatchewan Psychiatric Hospital so they lived on the hospital grounds. So dad grew up surrounded by kids and adults under psychiatric care.

He joined the army and served as a gunner in a tank primarily in Holland and Italy during World War II. When he returned to North Battleford he graduated as a psychiatric nurse. He was tough as shit.

Another example, we took camping vacations every summer and stopped at every point of interest. If there was anything even remotely connected to Indian Nations dad always took me aside from the other kids and would talk to me about the history of the place in depth. He would hammer it in my head over and over you have to be very proud you’re an Indian. I was extremely lucky to have him as a dad.
Once on a Sunday drive dad drove the family van through Musqueam, both the reserve -- by UVC and the reserve in Ladner. He explained this is the Nation where you’re from. He explained these are your people, your family. I just remember looking out the window wondering who I was related to. I also remember being out on our Ladner reserve and there was a chain link fence around the reserve with a sign on it that said “No trespassing. Trespassers will be prosecuted”, but as a child I thought prosecuted meant executed so I was really impressed with how tough Musqueam people were.

My grandmother Gertie Guerin was chief of Musqueam and my Uncle Delbert became chief later, which meant that they were often in the newspaper. Joyce religiously cut out any article to do with Guerin, any article about Musqueam. Every one of those articles went into the family albums because they were my family.

This is another example of how they tried to keep me connected to Musqueam, which I know is so much more than most foster kids get. I know this. And I’m also cognizant that they were preparing me for a possible eventual return to Musqueam, but in my view they went about it in a very thoughtful way.

And I remember there was one clipping of my -- he was an uncle -- Bob Guerin -- and he had been
appointed to some board, and it was just a small article in *The Sun* and I remember I stared at that for so long wondering who this guy was, you know, like how am I related to him. And now as I look back he’s the cultural leader who chose my name for me. He became someone very important in my life. And as a child all I had was this little clip that I would look at wondering who is this guy.

So although I could never have emotional discussions with Joyce she did this incredible thing for me, and I read those newspaper clippings over and over with my imagination running wild about what these people were really like, what was Musqueam like, and what did it mean to be an Indian.

So dad was an extremely strong man, and yes I always wanted to be like him, but him and I argued a lot. It was even noted in my file that I began to be argumentative. My foster parents attributed it to being the middle girl, comparing me to their argumentative middle son, my foster brother Dave, who argued with dad just as much as I did. It always seemed the two of us were arguing with dad. We didn’t argue with Joyce because she didn’t engage on issues or discussions, always referring me to dad, the authoritarian in the family.

In grade nine I was still maintaining good marks, attending an all-girls Catholic school. And you may
think no boys were around at our school but at lunch time our parking lot filled with carloads full of boys from St. Thomas More, the all-boys Catholic high school and the public high school. Our school also had no gym so for PE we were bussed to the YMCA for swimming, and a lot of the public school boys our age regularly sat in the viewing area to watch our swimming classes. We also had school dances in grade eight and nine and boys started asking me out on dates.

A nice boy from STM asked me out, asked if he could meet my parents so he could take me on a date. Mom outright refused and dad lost his shit. Over the course of a few months it became a bigger issue. Naturally I was still seeing this young man behind their back. We weren’t doing anything sinister or bad we just hung out and drove around in his car but it became a massive issue with my dad.

Dad and I began to argue and fight a lot during that time. I felt it was unjust, there were different rules in our house for boys and girls and different rules for my older and sister and I that I didn’t feel that they could justify. I spent a lot of time grounded in those weeks, worked alongside dad on a lot of projects around the house and generally feeling unhappy.

Then in February 1976 I was 13, the social
worker came and met with Joyce and I to discuss whether I wanted to be adopted by my foster family, and I agreed. The social worker offered family counselling to try to deal with the tension between dad and I but Joyce and dad felt that they could compromise with me without a need for counselling.

Then in November ’76 my mom’s sister Beryl Guerin sent a letter to my social worker offering -- the states “If Joni especially needs to get closer to family ties, which kids her age are usually concerned about, I’m here for her.” I also have to note that years later Beryl told me she had worked for the Vancouver Resources Board, which was a department of social services, and that she had pulled my file. I assume she saw that I was about to begin adoption proceedings so she sent this letter. My social worker then noticed me the Guerin family had made contact wanting to meet me.

I admit I’ve always had extremely mixed feelings about Beryl taking this action. First of all, she wasn’t my mother. I also believe mom was hurt that Beryl had reached out to me because from what I understand mom and Beryl did not discuss her taking this action beforehand. Now I realize what I felt was anger, and I’m still angry. I’m angry because I wonder why Beryl’s letter carried so much weight with the Ministry. In my
view, the answer lies in the handwritten note beside Beryl’s work number that she provided in the letter. The handwritten note says “Accounting Section VRB”. So to my social worker that says oh, she’s one of us, she works for the Ministry. And whenever I read Beryl’s letter I make a direct connection from her letter to the note in my file earlier when the Ministry notes “Do not approach mom to seek adoption content before the Supreme Court of Canada deals with this data as it might encourage mom to apply for my return.”

So the Ministry boldly states do not encourage my mom to apply for my return or to make contact with me but a letter from an aunt, who’s not my mother, caused them to immediately come back to me with a new choice from a year ago that they had proposed when I had already agreed to be adopted. And of course I wanted contact with my biological family, with my mom.

The Ministry met with dad and Joyce regarding the adoption, then they conducted a home visit with me, and I was now 14, and they state in the report that they tried to help me feel positively about my aunt’s intervention, but most importantly they presented me with a new choice, do you want to be adopted or do you want to meet the Guerin family. Good Lord.

And again much is redacted from this report,
but other notes do say “Michele states her wishes; she wants to be a police woman; wants to meet her biological family; will consider adoption after that meeting, and wants a copy of her own birth certificate”. The final note in the report says “We will not consider adoption at this time.”

At the time I remember feeling very confused, extremely emotional, with no one to talk to about these feelings of immense confusion. That is the social workers didn’t offer me any counselling. I had no youth worker, no private meeting with my social worker. Absolutely no resources were extended to me to help me sort through my feelings to help me make sense of what was happening. Where was the protection? Where was the best interest of the child? They had one job.

On top of that I had parents who never talked about emotions. I was literally given this monumental decision and my parents and social worker patted me on the head said “Good luck with your decision” and literally abandoned me emotionally, oh, except for one thing, then they made me part of a social experiment.

So in Tab 9, or whatever you want to call it, you’ll see there’s a report. In my file suddenly there appears a one page report dated May 6th, 1977 by a Brian McFarland. It’s the first time his name appears in my
file. Every entry of a report, or summary, or form, is
signed by the social worker. That makes it easy for me to
track their names throughout my file. This new name was
the anomaly, Brian McFarland.

Now I understand that this is when I became
part of a social experiment by the Ministry, or, as Mr.
McFarland refers to it, a demonstration project. The
project was to reunite 49 children with their biological
families and then see what happens.

The one page summary sets out that I was
placed in my present foster home after birth; natural
father’s whereabouts are unknown; major barrier is Mrs.
Edwards -- my mom -- current situation. She has had no
contact with her daughter over years. It goes on to say
“There is reason to believe mom is doing well and
interested in re-establishing contact with her daughter
with the eventual goal of having her return home.”

Most notable to me is the following quote.
“There is also every indication that Michele is interested
in her roots, her natural mother, and her heritage and
culture, native. Since talk of her natural family began
she has been acting out and making life very difficult for
her foster family and herself. However, this is viewed as
a manifestation of her ambivalence, fears, and insecurities
about meeting her mother, which is made especially
difficult by the close psychological ties she has with her foster family. Michele has a strong need to develop her own sense of identity and will continue acting out until these issues are dealt with. This suggests contact with her natural family be made as soon as possible in the hopes that she may establish regular contact and a relationship with them. From this a permanent placement plan can be established, either return to natural family or continued long-term foster care until she’s independent, whichever represents her best interests.” Then at the bottom of the page there’s a rating that’s noted number two minor, whatever that means.

So this is when I became part of the 49 children project. Once I received this file from the Ministry, my file, I made a subsequent Freedom of Information Act request for a copy of the 49 children project report but what they sent me was the 49 children project one year later report.

And I think I gave it to Breen, didn’t I. Did I give it to you? Yeah. So I gave -- I only had one copy and because of the size I didn’t copy it but you have it.

But one thing that was notable to me was that on the cover page the author is Brian McFarland and then it says Masters Social Work. And I can’t help but
wonder did I become part of Mr. McFarland’s Master’s thesis. Was like the 49 children project his thesis project? I suspect it was, and if so I get very angry at that proposition.

So as a result of this confusion on June 6th, 1977 I ran away from home, rather, I didn’t return home after school one Friday. I was picked up by the Surrey RCMP on June 24th and returned home. The report says I was picked up drunk and with a boyfriend. I was not drunk. I was in my boyfriend’s home in Surrey, the nice STM boy, sitting in his room listening to music. I hid in his closet when his parents and the police arrived at his bedroom door. My boyfriend encouraged me to go home. He was a nice boy.

The report then says I caused a commotion in the police station and kicked the police officer, and I don’t remember any of that. It doesn’t sound like me.

I was taken home and had a huge blowout with dad. I then overheard dad saying to the social worker “The little bitch is no longer welcome in our home.” I remember that moment vividly and how extremely painful that was to hear. I was sent upstairs to my room. Within an hour or two I tied sheets together, lashed them to the window post on the third floor, shimmied down the sheets and left for good. I remember feeling determined that I would never
return to that house.

I spent my first days as a runaway in New West, but then I spent most of my time in Surrey or Queensborough because I figured my family would never find me out there. I also set myself a goal. I’ve always been goal orientated. My goal was to panhandle $1 a day so that I could eat. So every day I would ask four people for 25 cents each, always using the excuse that I was 25 cents short for bus money. A dollar a day allowed me to buy a Pirate Pak from Whit Spot. They cost 99 cents back then. And every year White Spot celebrates Pirate Pak day and I always want to tell them hey thanks for keeping me alive.

There were a few times I slept in a scoreboard of a baseball diamond, and that was pretty peaceful. I could look out the slots and I could see the baseball diamond at night. I remember how pretty it looked and how peaceful, how safe I felt in there.

Most often I walked and walked all night until I was tired enough to go to sleep on the floor of a bathroom in a gas station, and I had my favourites, sometimes on the floor of public park washrooms. They never used to lock those up in those days.

Once I remember being cold so I climbed in the back seat of someone’s car to sleep and scared the crap out of the poor guy when he got in his car in the morning,
but I just bolted.

Lots of nights I just walked around all night because it made me feel more in control. I never drank by myself. I was straight all the time except when I interacted with others. I never panhandled for money to drink or do drugs. I panhandled to eat. And as I walked at night I could always tell when a creep had spotted me because they would start circling the block in their car trying to find where I went, and every time I’d just find somewhere to hide until they left the area. I could sit and hide for hours at a time, no problem. And I always remember the one prevailing thought I always carried was does anybody care.

Once I was hitchhiking. I was trying to get from Langley to Surrey. It was evening or dusk. A man pulled over to offer me a ride. Within minutes of getting into his car I could tell he seemed really dangerous and that he planned to attack me. He took a turn down an extremely dark dead end road and then began punching me in the head demanding a blowjob. He continued to punch me in the head the entire time I performed oral sex, the entire time. I was extremely afraid for my life. The incident lasted about five to 10 minutes. He then dropped me off on the highway and drove away. I walked for miles that night and I felt very alone, and again the prevailing thought I
always had was does anybody care.

Another day I was hitchhiking in Surrey and was picked up by a guy and told him where I was going. Then the guy took a turn in the wrong direction. I knew he was heading toward the U.S. border so I started freaking out and demanded he let me out. He refused and kept telling me to just calm down. I had my hand on the handle of the passenger door and told him if he didn’t stop the car I would jump. Again he kept saying “Calm down, calm down” but he wouldn’t slow the car down. So I opened the car door and I jumped out of a moving car.

I remember rolling over, and over, and over when I hit the ground, but he didn’t stop he just drove off fast. I was bruised, and shaken, and terrified, but again I just walked and walked until I felt I was in a safer open area and began hitchhiking again.

Another night during that period of time a young man befriended me to have a couple beer. We went to a nearby park to talk and to drink beer. The next thing I remember a bunch of other guys showed up. They were a team of some kind. And they stood in a circle demanding blow jobs, and I did what they asked. I was scared. I was humiliated. I remember them laughing. I remember the derogatory names I was called. And then they were gone.

Over the years I’ve looked back and wondered
Joni Michele Guerin

is group sexual assault a norm, or is it part of hazing for teams, or is it an actual team sport; how did these athletes -- and I expect most of them come from good families -- how do they simply set aside the values that they must have been taught by their parents about obtaining consent, and do police ever check these teams when they’re out wandering the street carousing to see what they up to, or are they just given a free pass because they’re jocks. I don’t know, but these are the thoughts that go through my head.

I believe that specific incident coincides with the notation in my file that says on July 1st, ’77 I phoned Joyce drunk and crying. I told her I didn’t want to go home I just needed to talk to her. Someone in the house I was in gave the address where I was. A social worker arrived. The report says the home was full of teenagers drinking beer. I don’t recall any of this. But these people had put me in the bathtub because I stank.

The report says I agreed to meet with Joyce a few blocks from her home to talk inside the social worker’s car. The report says they couldn’t find a suitable resource or a group home and that quote, “Michele couldn’t be reasoned with rationally.” They made an agreement I could stay in my bedroom over the weekend with no questions asked. “Joyce appears overwhelmed and feels
Michele needs therapeutic resources as she will run again. Michele appears totally confused and bewildered. She is very antagonistic towards her foster father who called her a slut. Her position in this family has been badly shaken.”

My question is why didn’t the social workers ask more questions? I had just been sexually assaulted by a group of athletes. These athletes were probably the pride of their families. And since then, like I said, I’ve often wondered how does that conversation even go among a team or group of athletes, how do they come to this group decision. It’s one thing to go hire someone in the sex trade industry for this purpose but how do they reconcile finding a 14 year old run away living on the street and doing this. Like what is that conversation like? And it’s vulnerable girls who are put in that position, Indigenous girls being the most vulnerable in this country. The stats show it. And this kind of assault happens over, and over, and over. I was 14 years old.

And now this was added to my sexual abuse timeline. Sexual abuse was a norm for me. Plus now I had been called a slut by my own dad, my dad who I had grown up wanting to be just like him.

It was after that incident that I placed in the Gullivan foster group home in Richmond kind of on the
Delta/Richmond border. Richard Gullivan was a fire captain in the Richmond Fire Department. His group home had actually been recommended to me by a guy friend I had met on the streets who said it was a really good group home. So I asked my social worker to be sent there and the social worker was relieved that there was somewhere I was willing to go.

It was during the time I was living at Gullivan’s that I was hitchhiking on Southwest Marine Drive in Burnaby and was picked up by a group of young men. There were as few of us riding in the back of a pickup truck. I had been carrying a knapsack that held my few possessions, some clothing, et cetera. One of the boys started pulling each item out and throwing it on the side of the highway as we drove along. It was so humiliating.

We went to a park and started drinking. My next memory was that it was dark outside and I was in the loft of some kind of a barn and a guy was on top of me raping me. I kept trying to get up but I couldn’t lift myself up. He climbed off and yelled next. I don’t know how long it went on. I only remember feeling humiliated and helpless.

This incident coincides with the note in my file that states “Michele was returned one night at 2:00 a.m. by three boys. She was drunk and hysterical screaming
Hearing - Public
Joni Michele Guerin

and calling herself a slut. She was crying and had grass
over her hair and clothes. Worker visited the next day and
discussed related incident, was non-judgmental, wanting to
know whether Michele felt the need for a change or not.
Michele did not admit promiscuous behavior. Birth control
was discussed with Michele and the need for a general
examination. The doctor’s examination summarizes, drinks a
lot for her age, smokes grass, emotionally unstable.” Good
Lord.

It’s the emotionally unstable note that gets
me the most. What would have happened if I was a little
white girl? Would she have been labeled a victim? It
didn’t matter I was Indigenous. So they labeled me
promiscuous at 14 years old.

And I was thinking of the Parkland Stoneman
Douglas student march for our lives protest the other day.
Some of the students wore big labels around their wrists
that said -- I think it said $1.04, and they wore this
price tag connecting it to a political message they were
sending to the NRA.

And ever since I saw that it struck me that
this is how Indigenous girls like me were labeled in the
Ministry. They’d pass this info onto the justice system,
the education system, to anyone who’d listen. In fact, I
might as well have worn a giant label around my wrist that
said promiscuous because that was the label they gave me for the rest of my file.

During this period of time was when I met mom. It was during July or August 1977. Of course the file doesn’t even give me the exact date for such an important event in my life, and I don’t recall it. Mom and I met in a small café right off Fraser and 57th Avenue in Vancouver. She worked in the area and we met during her lunch hour. It was a very quiet reunion. The social worker talked. Mom and I spoke very little. But I know we were both happy to have finally met. I remember being surprised at how short she was, she was five foot two, and she was surprised how tall I was.

I remember phoning Joyce that night to tell her I met my mom, and it was one of the few times in my life I ever heard Joyce shed tears, but she kept saying how happy she was for me.

Within a couple weeks the Guerin family arranged a dinner at my grandpa Victor and gramma Gertie’s house. It was at this visit that I met my brothers, grandparents, and other relatives. The first place I went on the reserve was to my mom’s where I met my younger brothers Leslie and Dwayne.

Leslie’s reaction to me was negative. He made it clear that he didn’t consider me his sister because
I had grown up with another family. I was okay with that.

On the other hand, my other younger brother Dwayne was excited and elated to meet me. I always remember his huge smile and how we clicked so well and he asked me to go stand in front of the front window to wave to his friends. I believe my cousins Arnold and Wayne were among those outside and they were so welcoming to me.

I also remember being at grandma’s and Aunt Beryl asked me to go outside on the porch to talk. Then she said to me “Your Uncle Daryl isn’t really your uncle he’s your brother. He was your mom’s first child that grandma legally adopted.” Good Lord.

So I was still living at Gullivan’s when I met my biological family, but from the very start I recognized something was off with Mr. Gullivan. I shared a room with another teenage foster girl, and I don’t remember her name, but Gullivan was constantly accidentally opening the door whenever we were changing. He also had a pool in his backyard and we were encouraged to swim a lot, which we did.

I remember once he asked if I wanted to go see his fire hall and I agreed. Why not? I remember feeling then like I was being presented like a fresh piece of meat. He stood me up in front of these firefighters and was like “See”. And then they got a call and we left --
and they left and then we went home.

Very shortly after that he took his family and myself for a weekend boating trip on his yacht. He had a big beautiful boat with a bridge deck with all the bells and whistles. We cruised all day in the sun among the small beautiful islands. I lay on the deck of his yacht sunbathing the whole day in a bathing suit, diving in and out of the water.

Then I awoke in the middle of the night. I was sleeping on a really skinny bench of a bed, but he was on top of me, with alcohol on his breath, and he had his hands down my pants and put his finger inside me. Gullivan’s wife then came up, and I remember it was so quiet on the boat and I was holding my breath because his kids were on the boat, and she smacked her husband in the head and told him to go back to bed. Mrs. Gullivan then whispered in my ear telling me I was a little slut and to leave her husband alone.

As soon as we got back to their home I packed my stuff and left. It is here in my file notes. “For the month of August we have no contact with Michele.”

Sometime during this period of time a friend took me to his friend’s house in Queensborough. He was older than us. A guy named Mark. We began to drink with them. When I woke up I was in bed with Mark raping me then
climbing off and directing men as to whose turn it was next.

When I woke the next day I took my things left and never saw any of them again.

So I kept walking, and walking, and walking. Like I said, I was walking around sober all the time. And it was one of these days when I was walking around when a seemingly friendly man in a truck offered me a ride. The man was much older, old enough to be my dad. I thought he was just a nice man. He stopped at a hotel, checked in, took me into a room, raped me, and then dropped money on the table and left. I just remember thinking what the fuck just happened. I’m not that person.

When I look back on it I believe this is one way it happens, you’re alone and vulnerable on the street, you’ve been sexually abused all your life, conditioned since the age of three to think that sexual abuse is normalized. One assault, one rape at a time, and then someone gives you money for something that has been happening to you your whole life, and there is a transition into the sex trade, and the money dropped on the table allows you to eat.

I feel absolutely no judgment towards women that get drawn into the sex trade or get drawn into sexual exploitation because I understand how it happens and I
think the government needs to legalize it to protect women.
It’s that simple, protect our women.

Once my file was transferred to Point Grey because I had moved in with my mom in Musqueam I told my new social worker about Gullivan’s sexual assault. I remember specifically saying to her “You really should stop putting girls in that group home because Gullivan sexually abused me.” I advised her of the incident, advised her of Gullivan’s wife’s reaction, advised her of Gullivan’s consistent behaviour of walking in while the teen girls who were put in his care for protection were changing clothes. The social worker replied “Well the boys really like it in there.” My social worker didn’t make a note of the sexual assault, made no notation of any of our conversation in my file, and nothing was done. I didn’t like this social worker and I know she didn’t like me. Her initials were SA, and although I can say her name, her name was Sheila Anderson, I call her SA bitch.

The thing that pisses me off the most is that he continued to sexually assault girls in his own home. I know this because in the early ‘90s an RCMP knocked on my door in Musqueam. I was renting a house on the reserve with my kids. I invited the Mountie inside to talk. My boyfriend Gary was there. The Mounty asked me if anything unusual had ever happened to me while I lived at
Gullivan’s. I told him about the incident on the yacht.

He asked if I had told anyone. I replied I told my social worker and my brother Kirk who was a Burnaby firefighter.

I learned that eight girls who had lived in the home had criminally charged Richard Gullivan with sexual assault but somehow he had been acquitted on all charges. The Mounty noted one of the challenges they faced in the criminal case was the credibility of some of the witnesses, as it sounded like some of these survivors, these girls, were now living hard lives. But now one of these girls was suing Gullivan in a civil trial. I agreed to be a witness in the civil trial and I agreed to share the sexual assault that happened on his yacht. I was also told by the Mounty that because I couldn’t say if we had boated in Canada or crossed into U.S. waters that weekend. They couldn’t establish jurisdiction therefore they couldn’t lay criminal charges in my case.

Once in court, because I had reported it to my social worker, all the lawyers wanted to see my Ministry file to see if my social worker had made a report. I stood beside four lawyers at the bench and said to the judge I didn’t feel it was fair that all these strangers would get access to my file, my entire life, without me seeing it. The judge ruled that I could make my FOI request and receive and review my file first before the other lawyers,
and that’s how I came to obtain my file. When it arrived by registered mail it was a jumbled mess in no order stacked in piles. I sat down to start reading it and read the whole thing in one night, and I cried, and I cried, and cried. There are a lot of painful memories in this file, and worse, there are a lot of opinions given about me in the file by tonnes of professionals, my grandmother Gertie, and others.

But back to Gullivan and me reporting it to the social worker, of course she hadn’t noted it. But I did testify at the civil trial and the girl won her civil case. They considered me a very credible witness. I was very, very happy for her.

She had been about six or seven years old when she arrived in Gullivan’s home and I believe she remained there until she was 19. And I think I remember her. There was a little girl who arrived when I was there, and because she was younger than us teens she had her own room.

So I was extremely pissed off and so angry that I had tried to protect her and I did what I was supposed to do and I reported this predator to the Ministry, whose job it was to protect us, but of course they did nothing. And I know why. First of all, they didn’t want to lose this group home. After reviewing my
file I can see the number of foster homes and group homes the Ministry have available to them in the lower mainland, and Gullivan’s was a valuable resource to them. So they had to sacrifice a few girls to be subjected to sexual abuse, big deal.

Secondly, my social worker never liked me, and I could tell that from the moment I met her. I was a headache to her probably already overloaded case file and I was just an Indigenous girl.

Interestingly, years later there was an investigation into a Richmond fire hall sexual exploitation ring in the late 1990s that was reopened in 2006. As many as 30 firefighters were involved. The story sets out the RCMP have reopened their investigation into allegations that dozens of Richmond firefighters sexually assaulted three teenage girls in the Vancouver suburb area in the 1970s. The girls were between 14 and 16 years old at the time of the alleged assaults.

It reminded me of when I was taken to the Richmond fire hall with Gullivan and I felt like I was on display like a fresh piece of meat.

So let me summarize where we’re at up to this point. They ripped me out of my mother’s arms to put me into a system to protect me. But where was the protection. I had been sexually abused in every single
home they put me in up to that point. I did what I thought was right. I reported the sexual abuse to my parents.
Nothing happened. I reported sexual abuse to my social worker. Nothing happened. I had been examined by Ministry doctors to put me on birth control. I had been picked up by the police a few times. Yet no one, no one asked if I had ever been sexually abused. The first one to ask was the Mounty who showed up at my door in Musqueam when I was 30 years old.

So as part of the 49 children project I was returned to mom and moved into her home in Musqueam where she lived with my brothers Leslie and Dwayne.
Leslie made it clear from day one that he didn’t consider me his sister because I was raised by a white family. I completely accepted that.
Dwayne and I clicked from the moment we met.
With Dwayne it feels like we started laughing together the moment we met and we’re still laughing. Dwayne was so proud. Man we had a lot of laughs when we lived together. We still have a lot of laughs together. My kids always say all the two of us ever do when we’re together is laugh. He’s my rock.
And lots and lots of nights we went out together to eat supper with grandpa Vic, corn beef hash or fish hash for supper. My grandpa Vic was awesome. The
The kindest man you’d ever meet. And he was married to my grandma Gertie, who was such a hard ass, but they made it work for 60 years or something.

And at first it went well with mom, however, it didn’t take long before there was tension. One day I was sincerely asking her if she minded if I called her Bev, because frankly we barely knew each other. Her response was “You can call me anything you want as long as you don’t call me shithead.” In my view, we were both damaged and hurt individuals now living together without any basis of a relationship being developed beforehand, absolutely none. I guess that was part of the experiment, let’s just put them together and see what happens.

I don’t recall exactly how long I lived with mom. I believe it lasted a month. During that period of time we had some good times and some tough times. I’m sure I drove her nuts.

I started school at Point Grey Secondary School but wasn’t comfortable, such a large school, expected to act like a normal kid, and disappointed when I was assigned to sit in a room to watch videos with other kids from the reserve. Good Lord.

I didn’t stay at Point Grey, but my best memories of Point Grey were taking the bus to school with my cousin Bert and Ozzie Stolgun (phonetic).
When I moved in with mom Joyce lovingly packed up all the special things I had collected since childhood. She had not done this for any of the group homes I had been in but I guess she thought this was going to be my final move. This included my skates, skis, a favourite bow for coat from my sister-in-law, a daughter ring I received on my 13th birthday, my favourite book, a hardcover edition of the book *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson, and other jewelry made by my foster grandfather.

I came home to my room one day and all those personal items were gone. When I asked where they were mom replied that she had thrown them away because I didn’t need them anymore because I was no longer part of that family. I was so hurt, absolutely devastated. Words can’t convey how hurt I was and so confused. It was one of the issues that really put a wedge between us at the time because I didn’t understand it.

But looking back as I wrote the testimony I now wonder if she was trying to cover up for someone else who might have done it, like a brother who didn’t accept me. It seems more logical to me.

It was around 1981 when I sat in a courtroom and watched mom get sentenced to Oakalla for writing bad checks. I remember her turning around in the courtroom to see if there was anyone in the family there and I saw her
relief that I was there but I also saw her shame, the
daughter that she had given up was sitting there looking at
her. I visited her in Oakalla and I was fortunate enough
that the guards let me hug her while we were there.

But during that time the band social worker
-- while she was serving her time the band social worker
approached me and said that they were in a position where
they may have to condemn mom’s home because she was a
hoarder and they asked if I would clean it. They didn’t
think anyone else could take the job on. And so I did.
And although this allowed her to remain in her house it was
the final wedge between her and I before she died.

And I don’t want to make it sound like these
kinds of situations only happen on reserves, because I had
to move in with my foster mother a year ago and I had to do
the same thing for her home, which was condemned, and I
spent a lot of time doing much of the same thing.

The night I left mom’s I came home one night
stood at the back door, it was locked, so I knocked, and
she stood looking at me through the window of the door but
she wouldn’t open it. We stood looking at each other a
long time. I kept asking “Are you going to let me in.”
She didn’t say a word. I ended up going across the street
and knocking on the door of a neighbour I had just met that
day, June Sparrow, and she let me stay the night.
When I first moved to the reserve I remember going to language lessons with the late Arnold Guerin. I was the only student. I would go sit in his office on the 51st hall and sit with this amazing elder trying so hard to learn our language. I also took a job delivering band notices door to door. And I had a couple nice boyfriends during that time. But sadly I also experienced more sexual abuse.

I had an uncle, mom’s youngest brother. His name was Glen. When I first moved there at 14, having just arrived on the reserve, he invited me to a friend’s house where we drank some beer, and then he raped me. Then he graciously offered to be my pimp. He explained to me that I -- or we I guess -- could make a tonne of money. I absolutely despised the guy. I hated him. And I don’t like to carry hate in my heart. It’s almost impossible to get me to hate someone. But I hated him because I had grown up as a child wanting so badly to meet my family and here was my own uncle offering to be my pimp.

I do admit that I did take some revenge on him when I broke into his house and stole cases, and cases of beer that he had gone and bought in Point Roberts during a beer strike. He was supposed to take it to some sports team of his and he was livid. I was 14. He chased me through grandma’s house. I ran downstairs into my bedroom
in the basement, slid a dresser in front of the door, and then climbed out the bedroom window. I’m still pretty proud of myself for that.

But that wasn’t the only encounter with him. Years later when I was a single mother living in my house with my three kids she showed up drunk at my back door. No one used my back door as it backed on to the Musqueam golf course. He asked for sex. I kept telling him to leave and threatened to call the police. He then advised me laughing that there was several men who went into the golf course at night to watch me workout through the window. I used to do Jane Fonda’s video every night after I put my kids to bed. It freaked me out.

I tried very hard over the years to have nothing to do with him. One of my last encounters with him was in 1995. He was the housing manager for Musqueam. I was renting a house on Humlesum (phonetic) Drive. The owners, three young adults over 19, wanted to sell the house and we agreed I would buy it. I went to talk to Glen. He said it was impossible to buy the house on the reserve even though many others had already done so. I will never forget his smug face rejecting me. So I moved my kids off reserve and we bought a house in Garibaldi Highlands in Squamish. One week later he sold that house to another lady on the reserve. I don’t begrudge the other
woman her home because I love her to pieces, but in my view he was a sleaze ball.

And I want to make a note here that it’s really hard for me to hurt people. It’s hard for me to name people because I don’t want to hurt anybody. But it’s also important that I just say who hurt me and that’s what I’m doing.

I used to hear rumours that the joke on the reserve was you should take Michele in because you get paid a lot of money because she’s a high risk youth and she’s a great housekeeper, but I knew this wasn’t true because many loving families took me in. Even those with small homes made a place for me. These included Mary Charles, Grace Mearns, Margaret and Dave Lewis, and June Sparrow. Muggy, who was Margaret Lewis, let me clean out her attic space to make a room for myself there. These loving families extended all they had to me purely out of love and compassion.

During that time I learned different rules in each house, such as each kid could only use four squares of toilet paper, or how to eat ketchup on a grilled cheese sandwich, how to use a ringer washer machine, and I had a lot of laughs with June, who was a young single mother. Their attitude was loving and comfortable and their attitude seemed to be that having me there just meant one
more can of beans in the soup or one more cup of rice in
the cooker. I felt welcomed in their homes.

These families didn’t have special training
to deal with high risk youths, they had culture, they had
love and compassion. I felt surrounded with a great deal
of love during some really tumultuous years. That’s why I
believe our Nations can do better. Our culture, our
teachings, being surrounded by large extended families full
of love is what our kids thrive on, and we should be in
charge of our own children’s care.

Eventually I ended up at grandpa Vic and
grandma Gertie’s house for quite a few months.

Being part of the 49 children project meant
they monitored and reported my reactions to being reunited
with my family. In addition to the social worker, I had
two youth workers who took me on outings once a week to
talk.

There are pages and pages of reports but
some of the highlights from those reports include April 78,
background on file I suppose, brought up by a white
Catholic family, been on the reserve a short time in
different homes. She talked quite a bit about home life in
New Westminster, which she seems to miss a great deal.
Said she doesn’t like indoor activities, wanted to go to
the park because she was used to picnics and hikes. She
talked about becoming Indian, eating Indian food, etcetera, why there seemed to be such division between white people and Indians.

May 78, basically Michele talks about her family in New Westminster and her own identity. She has a lot to sort out in this last area, who Michele is, what she is, and where she belongs. She feels caught in the middle, neither Indian or white. Culturally it is difficult for her. She has decided that the band is capable of accepting her as they did her brothers and that she doesn’t have to have only Indian friends. When something is on her mind she has a tendency to field an item, drop it, and come back to it later after she has digested your response.

Other worker May 1978; this period in Michele’s life is one of tremendous adjustment problems. She is quite simply learning to tie together her strict but loving Catholic upbringing with the rather chaotic the rules aren’t very clear life on the reserve with her blood relations. She wants quite consciously through this process to find out who she is and how she wants to be in life. She’s very insightful, and emotionally sensitive girl who really struggles actively to make sense of things. She uses me in our relationship very well in the process. Michele believes she is not well liked by most of her relatives and indeed in practical terms they have not been
in a position to extend themselves to her very much and
this has fueled her feelings of rejection. Nevertheless,
she wants to stay on the reserve. Overall Michele has
shown a lot of growth over these last four months and
basically stopped running and is using people to help her
deal head on with her life. Right now the main work for
Michele is this figuring out process. She is a courageous
girl who is not afraid to take emotional risks.

July ’78; since last report Michele has had
a placement breakdown at the Lewis’. We had a short flurry
of activity trying to find her a place off reserve where
she would be able to live her rather grown up lifestyle.
And this is when they put an ad in the paper, which is at
number 10. I should read it. Here it is.

So in May of ’78 my social worker put this
ad in The Sun and Province and it ran on Saturday, Monday
and Tuesday May 27th, 29th, and 30th, and the ad says “Do you
have space to share your home with a pretty independent
teenage girl. Absolutely no parenting required. Dunbar
area preferred. Please call Sheila Anderson, Point Grey
team.” Whatever.

And, you know, I can’t help but think of
Tina Fontaine and all these kids who are housed in hotels.
And they didn’t house me in a hotel but they put an ad like
that in the paper. I just found it despicable. The only
thing I was shocked at was they didn’t put the work promiscuous in there. A pretty teenage girl looking for a home. Like, I mean...

We had a short flurry of activity trying to find a place off reserve where she would be able to live her rather grown up lifestyle. This was superseded by Michele placing herself at her grandfather’s where she has remained. This period of transition indicated to me the kind of growth Michele has made. She showed a great deal of autonomy in her decision about where to move than she has in previous moves and a greater ability to accept responsibility and the consequences of her decision. At this time Michele is in a period of acting out, borrowing money from her relatives, and she even stole beer from her uncle. Her grandmother is saying she has reached her limit with her. I strongly suspect Michele is pushing to get thrown off the reserve.

September ’78; arranged meeting with social workers and youth workers. Grandmother, grandpa Delbert Guerin, the chief, accompanied a very sullen Michele to the meeting. They had employed the services of the police to bring her. Grandmother Guerin suggested they put Michele in the residential school at Mission. The Ministry file notes Michele was very determined however to make a place for herself on the Musqueam reserve, and while refusing
placement elsewhere bounced from home to home on the reserve. Finally when her family told her she would have to leave the reserve she ran away and surfaced with a job as a housekeeper and baby sitter. Four redacted. But that was Terry Sparrow.

One of the homes I lived in was with June Sparrow. June had two children and her brother Terry lived in her basement suite. He was a divorced single dad with three children. The youngest of his children was eight months old. Terry worked two jobs, one as a foreman for construction on the reserve, and nightshift at Canron Steel. He was also a tradesman, a drywaller, and a commercial fisherman. He is so intelligent and one of the funniest guys I’ve ever known.

I began to work for him as his live in babysitter. He was rarely home because at the time on his rare days off he was also building his own new house on the reserve. I was 15 years old. He was 26. When I met him he didn’t know my history, thought I was his sister June’s friend, assuming I was older than I was. We eventually started a relationship. When he moved into his new house I continued babysitting for him. His kids were wonderful. And since I had basically just finished growing up I figured I could raise kids so I became a stepmother to three young kids at the age of 15.
One season he came home with a fishing partner, a relative from the reserve. They had been drinking heavily before they arrived and I had a few beer and we all went to sleep. I woke up on the floor and his fishing partner was trying to wake me up and was holding the middle of my bra and slamming my body down on the floor. It was extremely painful. My head was being slammed on the floor and I had deep cuts on both sides of my body from my bra. He then dragged me into a room and raped me. I ran out of the house as soon as I could and slept at my grandpa’s house that night.

I went back the next day and told Terry what happened and after he saw my injuries he dropped me off at Oakridge Police Station and I filed charges. This brought hell to my life. My grandmother Gertie insisted I not lay charges because it would cause problems for the Guerin clan. My social worker avoided me for as long as she could and then eventually I was given a lawyer. I was terrified of the individual and was constantly being threatened and I spent much of those weeks and months terrified. And it was for that reason the Ministry says in my file that they assigned me a lawyer.

However, before the trial the wife of the man who had assaulted me came and sat at my kitchen table pregnant and asked me to drop the charges and so I did.
Months and months later I was in -- oh, no, sorry. My sister-in-law June was a member of the Pentecostal church and I became a member as well. I quit drinking. My life became raising kids and going to church. I read the bible almost completely through a couple times.

I often think that Terry probably saved my life. At a point in my life when I was so vulnerable and in need of protection he took me in and he let me love his little family, our little family. We lived off the land in the middle of the City of Vancouver, fish, deer, duck. And like I always say, I’d rather clean 500 fish then pluck and clean one duck, but I plucked a lot of ducks. Him and his brothers were great hunters. For food fishing him and I fished in a little 12-foot boat, and then we would clean them and sell them illegally to all our regular buyers. We had Asian families, Italian families, tonnes of regulars who each year would buy fish from us. And he was a commercial fisherman.

And I want to say this, months and months later I was inside the little church in Musqueam with our little congregation praying and the man who had raped me, the man I had charged, approached me and apologized. He was just sobbing and repeatedly saying he was sorry. And that means the world to me, because after a lifetime of sexual abuse and extreme sexual violence he has been the
only one to apologize, and of course I accepted it.

Then I became pregnant with my first son Keith Sparrow. He was born in June 1979. I was still a ward of the government. The Ministry apprehended him as a non-ward because he was born premature and they said they were worried I wouldn’t know how to care for him. They gave me taxi vouchers to visit him in his foster home every day.

One month later Keith came home to us. Two months later Keith died of crib death. It was one of the hardest days of my life, of our lives, of our children’s lives, and it changed me forever. It made me realize never to take my life, or anyone’s life for granted, because we never know how long we have on this earth.

I always took comfort that Keith died on the same weekend that Musqueam lost our oldest member grandpa James Point, who was over 100 years old.

An ironic thing is that right after Keith’s funeral, while I was still a ward of the government, my social worker asked me if I would be an emergency foster mother for a little toddler they had apprehended who had been living with her parents in a tent on the beach at Spanish Banks. She was Caucasian. Her name was Sandy Laughingriver. I agreed. I always thought it was so ironic at 16 years old I still had a youth worker assigned
to me and now I was a foster mother.

But Terry was also a victim of intergenerational trauma. This meant that I was subjected to a lot of domestic violence. Usually the violence was the worst when he was drinking but not always. I became accustomed to being ready to run out the door if he came home in a violent mood, which was often in those days.

After one beating -- it was the only time I did this -- I returned to my home in New West, explained to Joyce what had happened, and asked if I could sleep in my old bed. Joyce agreed.

After a woman has been beaten one of the best feelings in the world is to be in a warm bed in a safe house. I slept so well. But Joyce woke me up early, sat me at the kitchen table, and asked me what my plans were. No sleeping in allowed there boy. So I suggested maybe I should come back and go back to school at Marian High, graduate, et cetera. This woman who had never offered me advice my whole life, looked at me for a long time, and simply said "Who’s going to look after those kids".

So I left, got back on the bus to Musqueam, and went back to take care of Jodie, Julie, and Mack, and I don’t regret it one bit. It was the best advice she ever gave me.

Then I became pregnant again, although I
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miscarried that baby. So I applied to the Ministry to be married -- and you have that application in Tab 11 -- and they granted permission. We were married December 15th, 1979. I was 16. He was 27. We went on to have three more kids together, Victoria, Joni, and Terry.

There was one time Terry beat me when I was eight months pregnant. I had just asked his drinking buddies to leave because it was very late and the kids had to get up for school. I was thrown to the ground and then he smashed my head against the stove repeatedly. The men that were sitting there just sat and watched.

In the beginning I used to call the police but then didn’t bother anymore. It didn’t seem to serve any purpose. Except once when he broke my nose they made him leave. Usually they said I had to leave with my six kids, which was so frustrating. Good Lord.

After Musqueam won the Supreme Court of Canada Guerin case Musqueam band distributed $9,000 to each member of the reserve over the age of 19 years old. I bought a station wagon and Terry bought a truck.

When I knew I was going to get beat up I would leave. One night he came home and he was getting violent because I hadn’t returned the videos. I couldn’t get my car started so I ran down the street. As I stood in someone else’s yard I watched Terry get into his truck,
drive to the end of the block, turn around, floor it, and ram his truck right into the front of my station wagon. Then he backed up his truck into the neighbour’s driveway and rammed into my car a second time from another angle. I called the police. They arrived and said it was Terry’s property and he could do what he wanted with it and they left. Terry stayed in the house playing the guitar.

In 1985 I got permission from my husband to travel to a church gathering in the States. It was the first time I had ever taken a break from our family. He was to pick me up on a certain day in Lynnwood, Washington. When I phoned from Lynnwood our oldest son, who was in his teens at the time, said that dad was arrested for drunk driving at the U.S. border. He was in jail in Blaine, Washington. My stepson advised me the kids were in bed, everything was fine, and I said I have a ride home in the morning.

I arrived home the next morning to an empty house and a business card from a VPD sergeant. The sergeant advised me my three children had been apprehended by the Ministry. When I asked what had happened to my three stepchildren I was advised the band social worker made arrangements for them to stay with family on the reserve.

So once again I felt rejected and angry. I
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was terrified that I would lose my kids to the system. I went to court the next day to identify them. It was the most painful moment in my life. They were like two, three, and four years old. As I stood in front of the judge the first question he asked me was what are you going to do about your drinking problem Mrs. Sparrow? I proudly replied “I don’t drink, Your Honour.” He mumbled an apology and opened the file. It took me three days to get my kids back and I thought I was going to lose my mind.

But the Ministry was back in my life and I was determined to get them out. They ordered my husband to domestic violence counselling, ordered both of us to take parenting/life skills classes, and I had to go on an outing once a week with a social worker who would show me how to parent, a worker who had no kids. But I was determined to do everything they asked to get them out of our lives, and a year later they were gone.

Soon we decided to separate and divorce and it became a fight for who would get the marital home on the reserve that was in both our names. Because you can’t sell the land on reserve -- it’s Crown land -- you have to revert to band policy. I remained living in the house with my three kids and I became subjected to violence by some members of his family who didn’t want me in there.

One day I had 100 rotten fish dumped on my
yard and a bicycle thrown through the front window. I wasn’t home but my six kids were and they phoned 911 and hid in an upstairs closet terrified, but the police didn’t attend. When I got home I was livid. Talked to some sergeant in VPD who apologized and said they thought it was a prank.

I went to Chief in Council about the lack of policy to protect women from being shoved out of homes on the reserve to go live in poverty in the east end. They had no answer for me. I left the reserve at that time.

I want to say this; about one year ago Terry apologized for everything he did to me. He had carried a huge weight for years. I explained to him that he suffered from intergenerational trauma. I also thanked him because I said he probably saved my life and he gave me all our beautiful kids. Today he is my favourite elder, a dear friend, and still one of the funniest guys I know. He’s been sober for years and years and I’m very proud of him for the example he is to our children and the happy life that he has with his wife.

In 1985 I was determined it was my kids and I against the world and I got my first job as a file clerk. I was so shy and so afraid to make eye contact with people. When I took the bus to work I didn’t want to draw any attention to myself by ringing the bell on the bus so I
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would wait till someone else did it, even if it meant I had to walk back three or four blocks.

This is where I know the Creator has a sense of humour, because he made me secretary to Chief Joe Mathias, George Watts, Simon Lucas, and Gerald Amos. I was the shyest person and these are some of the strongest leaders and best orators in the history of Indigenous politics, all of them with an incredible sense of humour, all of them staunch fighters for our rights, all of them warriors. My job was to take minutes at their meetings, chief’s assemblies, strategy meetings, caucus sessions. What a learning ground.

I decided to go back and get my grade 12 at night through a GED. When I was successful I phoned George Watts and said “I’m so happy I got my GED today.” He growled and said “I thought you said you had your grade 12 when I hired you” and I said “Well, I lied, but I have it now.”

During that time I met my husband Gary. He’s now a retired VPD police officer. He worked with a lot of native youth in the east end and came to a meeting to ask us if there was a list of band office phone numbers he could get because he wanted to find a way to connect kids on the street with their people back home in the communities. That question made me turn my head right
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around to look at who is this guy, and the rest is history.

We’ve been together 30 years now.

He was on the SWAT Team. I consider myself part of the police community as much as I do part of the Indigenous community. At one time I was hired to travel throughout B.C. to educate British Columbians on Aboriginal rights, Indigenous case law, and the modern treaty process. The chief of VPD had me present to every team training day. I don’t know how many police officers I spoke to but it was the majority of their members. I did about 21 presentations over a period of 10 months.

I also during that time spoke to regional districts, and mayors, and union groups, and rotaries, and everything, and what I learned then was that British Columbians really care and they want to reconcile with Indigenous people but they don’t know how to do it, and I hope that we get there.

I worked for the tribes in B.C. and Canada for 30 years in various capacities. I owned and operated by own gill netter I called Fisher Chick for years on the Fraser River and I sold it when I decided to go to law school.

I worked as a 911 operator in the Town of Squamish. It was there one night in a radio room that I heard a Mountie behind me say “I don’t arrest Indians I
I want to speak about my daughter Victoria and my granddaughter Tatum Rain. Victoria with her long-term secure relationship with a man 18 years older than her -- he is exactly my age. He had been my friend when we were young. She was 24 I think when their relationship started and he had three kids, and she was a great stepmother to those kids, and they had Tatum Rain together, but over time they grew apart and split up.

And it was while Vic was on the rebound she got into a relationship with a white guy her own age who was living on the reserve. There was a whirlwind wedding in Vegas. They came back. And then he began beating her, viscous beatings. One day I got a call from the Native police liaison in Musqueam Steve Anoose (phonetic) to advise me that she was at VGH. I raced over there to find my baby girl lying on a gurney in the lobby with a police officer sitting beside her. She was covered in bruises from head to toe. I stood and held her, wiped her tears. And after the doctor cleared her to leave I was shocked that the police said that they were arresting her. I watched as my bruised and battered baby girl was put in the back of a paddy wagon. And my question to the Commission is how many white girls are arrested after they’re beaten up? You guys have researchers. I’d like to know the
answer to that question.

I was very afraid for Vic’s life while she was with this man, and I had tried to reach out to him. I had tried to show him love, extended forgiveness. One way was I arranged for all our children as a family and their partners to attend the UBC ropes course for one day to do team building. I extended an invitation to him to come if he wanted to remain as part of our family but he never showed.

Social workers got involved. Because of the severity of the beating they advised my daughter Tatum Rain could be apprehended because her safety was at risk and her mom lived with this man. My daughter and he separated, although I wasn’t sure.

I supported Vic as much as I could. I sent her and Tatum to Disneyland over Christmas. I took a six month leave from work because I wanted to become her safety plan.

On New Year’s Eve I had traditionally babysat Tatum Rain so Vic could be free to enjoy the night. I had done that every year for years and years. So I arrived on New Year’s Eve at her basement suite to pick up Tatum and I came around a corner and I saw her ex Jeremy’s truck parked down the block. It was obvious he was waiting for me to pick up Tatum and leave. I had a new car so he
didn’t recognize me. I sat in her back driveway for a long
time thinking. Then I made my decision that I felt would
save my daughter’s life. I called the non-emergency police
line. I explained the situation. I explained he had a no-
go to her premises. I explained there was an outstanding
warrant for his arrest. I told them I knew now my daughter
was lying to me about not seeing him anymore. I said I
will leave it to you to decide if you have time to deal
with this tonight. I only asked that they gave me time to
go inside and pick up my granddaughter Tatum and leave.

I went inside and picked up Tatum who was
dressed like Princess Belle from Disneyland. She fell
asleep in the car on the drive back to my house in North
Van. During that time VPD phoned me a couple times asking
me to describe his truck, whether he had a dog, how many
entrances there were to the suite, and I took Princess
Belle home and put her to bed. About an hour later my
daughter Joni phoned to tell me Jeremy had been arrested.
Today is the first time Vic has learned that I was the one
who called the police. But I did it to save her life, and
I’m proud of my actions.

My daughter Joni had an experience with her
boyfriend, a nice hardworking Indigenous man. They were
living in North Van a couple of years ago and they got in
to a verbal argument. The police were called and they were
both arrested. She’s a professional woman, as is Victoria. They’re both professional women. And they were arrested for the night. When Joni appeared before a judge in the morning he shook his head at the absurdity of the arrest. And again my question is how many white girls get arrested who have been victims of abuse?

I’ve had the honour of sitting in treaty negotiations with tribes in Canada and B.C., and you may think that the talk is all about land, and cash, and resources, but I always think of one beautiful grandma who sat at the main table sessions angry every time, so angry, as she addressed Canada and B.C. negotiators angry about her grandchildren being taken away by the Ministry, insisting that it’s the hereditary chiefs of our Nations who have authority over our children not the province. I watched Canada and B.C.’s negotiators respond with high respect, enormous empathy, and a willingness to find solution, and I think of that warrior woman often.

So what’s my main message? My main message is our people I think could do a better job caring for our children than the current system. And it would especially be the case if you funded services for family support services and give our kids the same level of service as non-Indigenous kids have access to. I don’t understand why you don’t run courses, why courses aren’t run in adult ed
and training at night schools for kids on the street. Give them shelter and educate them at the same time.

To kids in care I want to say don’t give up. If you want to make your social worker accountable let them know you will file an FOI request as soon as you’re old enough. I think every former child in care should do an FOI on their file and let’s see what they say about it.

The kids in care I also think should found out who your MP and MLA is in your area. Email them when you aren’t receiving support and/or services from the Ministry and let your voices be heard.

I’m here because I’m a survivor. I don’t want sympathy. I don’t need it. I’m strong. But nothing has changed in the system since I was in it. That became clear with Tina Fontaine and all the others you have heard about during these hearings. My story is still relevant because there are hundreds of our girls still living these stories, hundreds of our kids.

I’m almost done.

I met Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond when she gave a lecture to our first year law class and I acted like a groupie because she’s one of my heroes. Collectively Indigenous female lawyers across the country hold her in the highest regard. I was elated when she was appointed as B.C.’s representative for children and youth. I wanted to
write her a letter to thank her.

Apprehending children separates them from family, community, and cultures, and results in emotional trauma and loss of identity. Many become victims of sexual assaults. So how does this differ from residential schools again? For example, the representative recently reported that 121 children and youth were victims of sexual assault while in government care between 2011 and ’14. Of those 109 were girls, 74 Aboriginal. The reality of sexual violence is a regular occurrence for young women on the street. I know this. I experienced this. And do you know what a high risk youth thinks about as they walk the streets day and night, we simply wonder does anyone care at all.

I talked in my letter to her about Gullivan, and I finished with this week retired judge Ted Hughes, said a representative of Turpel-Lafond, the job was carried out in a confrontational manner sometimes. Could the job be done without that? It’s an open question. Undoubtedly the job requires someone who’s not afraid to stand up to government.

I want to thank Ms. Turpel-Lafond for your toughness, hard work, and dedicated service. It was comforting to have such a powerful advocate for our children and youth. Most of all thank you for caring.
Trust me, we noticed.

When Tina Fontaine’s murder was acquitted I publicly posted the article about his acquittal and wrote “Fuck you you fucking fucks” on my Facebook page. And I appealed and asked our Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould where is the justice. It was an honest appeal to a sister that I hold in the highest respect. Good Lord, we watched her grow in her career. As an Indigenous female lawyer of course I respect her but we need action, and I hope that she’s leading that conversation in Ottawa.

And that question I had what does it mean to be Indian, trust me, now I know. People who know me know that I tend to shed tears when I stand up in front of a nation of people. I’m reminded of that question I always had. And then I find myself standing in front of and I’m facing a powerful tribe -- another powerful tribe, and a vibrant culture with traditional institutions that are still intact, and I feel like it hits me like a wave. I feel like I shed tears and say okay Creator I’ve got it, I know what it’s like to be an Indian because you just -- these nations are so beautiful and amazing.

As I wrote this testimony I thought of all the powerful leaders I know, so many of my friends on Facebook even, Miles Richardson, my nickname for him is 1.6, Gudjo (phonetic), who’s pure warrior, Francis Frank,
Judy Sayers, Gerald Amos, all these warriors who stood up, put blockades in front of their forests and their sacred lands to protect them, and they succeeded. And today I feel like I’m willing to put a blockade in front of our children to say no more, you don’t protect us so we will protect our own children. I’ll stand with Cindy Blackstock or anyone who asks to find solution. And why, because it’s 2018, we need political will.

Lastly, I just want to say I saw a meme the other day that said you’re going to have a happy life but first I’ll make you strong. And I do have a happy life. And I thank you for listening.

MR. BREEN OUELLETTE: I will now ask if the Commissioner has any questions for Michele.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Merci beaucoup, Maître Ouellette.

Everything was said, everything. I cannot add more or ask questions. Everything was in your message, your ton témoignage -- that three generation where -- I’ll get the English version -- where it’s more common than question. Like I said this morning, there’s always a reason why it was meant to be or our paths cross. And you’re very powerful, very powerful. And I’m not there to give you sympathy but just to say that I’m very proud to be the one sitting here and receiving every word that you say.
and you’re sharing.

Not only that, but this momentum it’s also
to tell Canada what’s still wrong today in 2018. And many
of us are ostriches, you know, that bird, pretending it
doesn’t exist, or it used to be, or it’s something
happening just over there, where your experience is telling
us that the moment you were born until your granddaughter
still today.

Here the right word I want to say, the
failure of the foster care system and the social worker to
protect Indigenous girls from violence they weren’t there
for you. And the sad part, with this inquiry I’ve heard it
before, we all did, but now Canada does, that it’s
happening in my community, in my (inaudible). It’s
happening in Rankin Inlet, Goosebay, Yellowknife,
Whitehorse, everywhere. We know that. But what I don’t
understand it’s still happening.

So your message, powerful it is, very, very
powerful, they cannot pretend that it’s an isolated
situation. Thank God that we have -- I’m swearing like
you. My God -- what did you say -- Good Lord. Good Lord
we have strong advocate, and I know for sure you are one of
them.

And it’s the first time I hear about the 49
project -- 49 children project. Can you tell me a little
bit more about this?

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: I don’t know much more than what’s in the file.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Okay.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: I just know that they selected 49 children. I’ve read the one year later report that they sent me but it references so much in the original report that it’s hard to make sense of it.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Okay.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: It’s something that I’m very interested in getting a copy of because I’d like to know what their objective was.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Did you request that copy?

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: I did, and they sent me the one year later report.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Okay. The one you have.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: And we have it now?

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: You have the -- they didn’t send me the original 49 children project report they sent me the 49 children project one year later update.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Oh, one year later.

Okay. Merci.
MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: And so there’s a lot of references in that report that says see page 40 of the original report, blah, blah, blah. So I haven’t seen that report, and I’d like to see that report.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: One of the — there’s many priorities. We all know that. And because of the time we’re having, policing, the relationship with the police, or in general it’s a priority for the four Commissioners and the national inquiry, but also the child welfare system with the Ministry, very, very important.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: So there will be a second phase. And I call for me an expert — it’s a family member or a survivor, a person who went through that experience or trauma, for me those are the experts. Is it possible that we stay in touch when we will sit with those ministries across Canada or the federal one and say bon we have some experts who know exactly what happened? And I’m not a lawyer, but I try to be very comfortable in that world, but sometimes when I’m not I ask people who has that expertise what are the questions, the tough questions that we need to ask ---

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: --- and what are the solutions.
MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: We know the solution, but Canada needs to hear. There’s that tool, this inquiry. And I hope the door is open that we can connect with you and your part of an expert, a knowledge keeper, and it would be very important for me. And I believe we should be in charge big time for our children.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Being a mom of five beautiful children we do everything to protect them but sometimes the system is not there to support us. So is it something I can count on you?

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Absolutely.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Merci beaucoup.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Absolutely.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Merci beaucoup.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: And I’ve seen examples of self-governing tribes now who have jurisdiction over childcare and child welfare in their communities, and I see the successes. And Huu-ay-aht has just declared a state of emergency over their own children. And people taking control, and now they have the authority to do it, and this is what I am a big advocate for, because I do believe that our children thrive the most in our own
communities around our culture.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Yes.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: And I tried -- you know, the chart that may have been boring that I walked through in the beginning, where I kept trying to emphasize how, you know, this child is well-adjusted, blah, blah, blah, you know, it was to demonstrate that all the sexual abuse is going on in my life but they’re calling me a well-adjusted child. Like they had no -- I don’t even think they had interest in knowing what was really happening because as long as the case file’s going along and doesn’t have to interfere with my workload it’s -- you know. So I would be honoured to have anything to do with follow-up. And, like I said, I’ll -- I’m very motivated.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: And also where it’s more personal, where did you get that strength, that resilience, and that empowerment to stay alive?

Many of us decided to end our life because it was too much.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: And you’re still here today. And everywhere we go the families that we hear of the survivors -- I will say sorry -- that went through the trauma that you went, the solution was that they want to
end their life. And still today the mental health so fragile.

What keeps you here today?

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: What keeps me here today?

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Only if you want to answer.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Well, you know, I’ve always thought I got a lot of strength from my dad, and I think rooted in that was how he drilled it in me to be proud of my culture. But underlying it I didn’t know what my culture was so I had this absolute intense interest in finding my tribe, and finding my people, and learning all of that.

And, you know, I just think I’m -- I have a thing that hangs in my garage that says “Believe there is good in the world” and the words “Be the good” is highlighted. And I always feel like that’s how I approach life. I just -- I know that you’ve got to keep fighting every day and you’ve just got to -- and this is where it hurts me to see kids who are suffering in care who should be being cared for, and loved, and they need that, someone to give them that strength to say go on, don’t give up, you know, just don’t give up. Like don’t think that this is going to be your entire life because it isn’t. You’ll get
out of it and you can become a lawyer one day. I never thought I’d be a -- you know, get to this position, but it was one step at a time, you know, and one goal at a time.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Did you ever hear about that I was in a hearing and most of the families who spoke -- no, all of them who spoke in private or in public we always heard about their children being apprehended, or they were the one apprehended, so always related to the child welfare system, always.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: And at the end one man off camera outside after the ceremony just grabbed me, never met that man before, said “Did you know this is an industry here in Canada” and I was like whoa, and that was the last hearing we went in Manitoba.

Did you hear that before?

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: I have heard that, yeah.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Okay.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: You know, I don’t really have a -- I don’t know enough about it, you know, to know whether I could form an opinion on it. But, you know, I do see -- like I said, based on the homes that I’ve been in and the way that I experienced group homes and foster homes, and then in non-Indigenous homes and then in
Indigenous homes, it’s entirely different, and you’re -- you know, it’s why I advocate for it, because I think that there’s so much love and support and culture around a child and that is what they need the most. The industry, I don’t know. I don’t know.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Okay.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: I’ll find out. I really need to know, because it’s -- what do we say in English? It struck me. I was like h’m I hear -- pardon me -- yeah, shocked me.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: We have, only if you want, something for you, for your courage, your resilience, but also I don’t think Canada will forget your message. I won’t.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: It was very, very powerful. And I still say I’m blessed, I’m glad I was the one. Very, very powerful.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: And I want to say thank you to the elders who come.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Yes.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Everywhere I go I ask
women from the land to support.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: M’hm.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: And merci beaucoup.
And we have something for you if you accept it.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Yes. Thank you, yes. Of course.

COMMISSIONER AUDETTE: Bernie, do you want to explain.

MS. BERNIE POITRAS: I just want to say Howa to you, Michele. Not too often I cry. Your message is very powerful. I work on the frontlines right downtown east side, and the question that you asked does anybody care, we spend a lot of times in those allies with the kids now, and I just wanted to say how much I really honour you. It’s a very powerful message. And I’m so glad you’re here. I really am. And your message is very powerful, and I know they’re listening.

And also Gudjo Heckenwells (phonetic) are from my home territory too.

MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN: Oh, are they.

MS. BERNIE POITRAS: So I want to say Howa to you again. And these eagle feathers they started their journey -- not these ones, but I believe these eagle feathers come from Manitoba. Every place that we were
going sometimes we ran out, we do a call out, but the
journey started in Haida Gwaii, my home territory, with the
matriarchs, over 400 eagle feathers made their way. But
these ones now come from Manitoba, I believe from Thompson,
Manitoba.

**MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN:** Wow.

**MS. BERNIE POITRAS:** So the families, the
spiritual people, Sechelt, you know, sent, like the whole
wings of the eagles and that ---

**MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN:** Right on.

**MS. BERNIE POITRAS:** -- on this journey.

But this is a gift from the families all across Canada to
you for sharing your story.

**MS. JONI MICHELE GUERIN:** Thank you very
much.

(SHORT PAUSE)

**MR. BREEN OUELLETTE:** Commissioner, I am
asking if you would like to adjourn the hearing.

**COMMISSIONER AUDETTE:** Translation, he wants
to adjourn.

(LAUGHTER)

**COMMISSIONER AUDETTE:** Usually what we do in
Quebec, in Thompson, if people want to come and give love
to the family or the survivor it’s always a beautiful
gesture.
--- Exhibits (code: P01P15P0107)

Exhibit 1: Province of British Columbia child protection order for Joni Michele Guerin made April 23, 1963 by Judge W. Murphy.


Exhibit 3: Folder containing two digital images provided by the witness, one of which was displayed during the public testimony of Michele Joni Guerin.


Exhibit 5: One-page advertisement placed in Vancouver Sun and Province newspapers September 4-8, 1964 regarding the whereabouts of Beverley Joan Guerin.

Exhibit 6: Letter from Mrs. Ralph Harris (Beryl) to Mr. Tom Mountenay, dated November 18, 1976 and reply from Irene Falk, social worker, dated December 8, 1976.


Exhibit 10: Request for permission for Joni Michele Guerin to marry, dated November 9, 1979.


Exhibit 12: Ministry of Social Services severance notice (one page).

--- Upon adjourning at 4:10 p.m.
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Marie Rainville, 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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Marie Rainville

April 10, 2018