National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Public Hearings
Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel
Minoru Room C
Metro Vancouver, British Columbia

PUBLIC

Wednesday April 4, 2018

Public Volume 87

Juanita Desjarlais

Heard by Commissioner Brian Eyolfson
Commission Counsel Fanny Wylde

INTERNATIONAL REPORTING INC.
41-5450 Canotek Road, Ottawa, Ontario, K1J 9G2
E-mail: info@irri.net – Phone: 613-748-6043 – Fax: 613-748-8246
II

APPEARANCES

Assembly of First Nations                        No Appearance
Government of British Columbia                   Sara Pye (Legal counsel)
Government of Canada                             Donna Keats (Legal counsel)
Heiltsuk First Nation                            No Appearance
Northwest Indigenous Council Society             No Appearance
Our Place – Ray Cam Co-operative Centre          No Appearance
Pauktuuit Inuit Women of Canada                  No Appearance
Vancouver Sex Workers’ Rights Collective         No Appearance
Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak/Women of the Métis Nation No Appearance
III

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Public Volume 87
April 4, 2018
Witness: Juanita Desjarlais
Commissioner: Brian Eyolfson
Commission Counsel: Fanny Wylde
Clerk: Christian Rock
Registrar: Bryan Zandberg

Testimony of Juanita Desjarlais. .............................. 1

Reporter’s certification ........................................... 45
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No exhibits marked.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MS. FANNY WYLDE: Good afternoon, Commissioner. Before I introduce you to our next witness, the witness would like to share a song, an opening song. So, I would like to invite the elder to come forward.

--- SONG PERFORMED

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you for this beautiful song. So, Commissioner, I would like to introduce you to Cintesapa Taweya (ph), Juanita Desjarlais will be sharing today her story as a survivor of many forms of violence. Before I do let her speak, I will ask the Registrar to please swear in the witness, and the witness would like to provide oath with an eagle feather.

MR. CHRISTIAN ROCK: Juanita, do you promise to tell the truth of your story in a good way today?

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: I will try my best. That’s all I can do.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you, Mr. Rock. So, Juanita, I would like you to invite you to introduce yourself to Commissioner, and maybe start by where you’re from.

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: Okay. My traditional name is Cintesapa Taweya, and that’s who I am. I am known to Creator and to my ancestors by my traditional
name. And, here, in Canada, my colonial name is Juanita Desjarlais. My relatives are from Northern Alberta, Naheal (ph) and T’ina (ph). And some of my relatives, they come from Fort McKay, Beaver Lake, Chard, Lac la Biche (ph), and La Loche, Saskatchewan.

So, I am a survivor of colonialism. I’m a survivor of genocide. I’m also a Seventies Scoop, but Sixties Scoop survivor as well. I’m also a survivor of violence. And, I believe that my journey has, in life, from the time I was born until now, it’s taken me all this time to be able to share my story and my experiences in life with the people to hopefully inspire. This is for our past, present, and future generations. And, that’s my belief.

And, I hope to inspire or encourage any young people who are living remotely in -- and even our women in remote communities and communities throughout Turtle Island, to be able to step forward to promote healing and to promote change and talk about those things that are unspoken. Those secrets that are hidden in the small communities.

So, I’m here today to share my story, to share my strength, to share my love with the people, and that love for myself and my family here. And, I’m also here for that healing for my generation, my son, you know,
both of my sons, and my future grandchildren, and our
future generations.

And, also, hopefully to promote changes
within the judicial systems, and policy changes within the
RCMP detachments, Vancouver Police Department, and
throughout institutional organizations. And, individually
as well, because I believe that this is a human issue. We
are all responsible for our words, for our actions, for our
beliefs. And, I think that it’s about time that we stand
in, in that change, and promote self-awareness and healing,
and to be able to stand up and speak up about those things.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** Thank you. So, Juanita,
maybe you could start by sharing how you were brought up?
What was your childhood like?

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** Son say (ph), I
love you, Mom, and none of what I have to share is intended
for any harm to you, no disrespect, and I love you, and I
understand today that it’s a deeper issue, other than I
know that it’s -- what happened to us is a result, a direct
result of colonialism and genocide against Indigenous
peoples.

My family is not the only family who
suffered at the hands of violence, addiction, alcoholism,
and I pray that, you know, we can move forward in a good
way. And, just know that I love you, no matter what. And,
I love you with all my heart, and I respect you.

So, as a little girl, I have -- my fond memories are when I was an infant. I was gifted in life with the ability to be able to have memories of when I was a baby. And, I would share that with my mother. And, she’d say, “How do you remember that? You were just, like, a baby?” And, I was like, “I don’t know. I just kind of remember.” You know, I remember the walls, and I remember people crying, and I remember there being, like, this big wooden casket. I didn’t know it was a casket when I was a baby, but I definitely remember seeing my mom upset. And, she said I was just, like, I don’t know, how old?

**MS. DESJARLAIS’ MOTHER:** Two, three.

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** Was I? I thought I was younger.

But I have other memories, too, and those are memories of my kokum. And, I remember feeling so happy, you know, with her, and so proud, and you know, that love that I experienced from her. She was always, like, very proud of me. She bought me clothes and would take pictures and stuff of me. And so, you know, I am very thankful for that.

So, that was, like, the early part of my childhood. And then somewhere along the lines, you know, things kind of changed; right? I never, you know, like --
I grew up learning my language. My mother would speak to me, you know, in her traditional language, and she speaks two languages, and fluent in one, or two? In two. So, as a young child, you know, that’s what I knew. And, I grew up on the reserve and out in the wilderness, and I remember the love for my family, you know. I remember that deeply.

And, at some point, you know, I was sent out to a cabin with extended family. I’m not sure if she was my biological family or not, but, you know, I have very fond memories of them too. And, you know, my mother had sent myself and my brother out there, you know, probably for protection and safety. And, you know, this woman, she was elderly, and she had this cabin. And, there was no running water. There were no, like, toilets or anything inside. And, she was a trapper.

And so, she would take my brother and I out, you know, basically every day to go and check those traplines. You know, and we’d have to get a bucket inside, you know, to go to the washroom, because it was very cold outside; right? But, still, you know, those are really fond memories that I have of being a little girl. And, I don’t know how long we stayed out there.

She taught us how to work with moose hides, and to sit, and to be -- even though we probably didn’t know what we were doing. But, you know, that culture and
that way of life, you know, is very strong. And, she never
spoke to us in English. She spoke to us through her eyes.
She spoke to us through her language. And, you know, I
have good memories, you know, being with my mom, and
walking with my mother, you know, and hearing those
typical stories about the Northern Lights and to not
whistle; right?

So, I have good memories. And, somewhere
along the line I think I was probably five years old, and
you know, I have -- I think it probably started before
five, but after we left that cabin was when things began to
change. And, my memories that I have are not good. And, I
remember how I felt.

And, I remember that, you know, I was being
touched, you know, in ways that weren’t appropriate, so in
my private area. And, this was a person that I was
supposed to trust. And so, what he did was -- what I
believe today is he began to groom me, you know, into a
lifestyle where eventually I became sexually exploited as a
youth and as a young person. So, I was molested as a
little girl, and I have memories of, you know, being --
it’s just very graphic, very horrible.

But, you know, I never really talked about
my experience. I was in therapy for -- that I found on my
own later on in life. I had to go to therapy for a minimum
of eight years, because I had no life experience. I had no idea whether my emotions are accurate or not. I had no experience with life being sober. I had no experience at all.

I didn’t know -- I knew rage. I knew rage. I knew how to disconnect from my body. I knew how to disconnect from people. And, that’s kind of what I experienced growing up. So, when I was first apprehended from my mother, but I don’t believe it was for that, I believe it was because my mother, you know, had an alcohol problem. And, today, I understand it to be different. You know, my mother also experienced colonialism and genocide.

And, my views changed after I started working with a feminist organization, and I grew to understand, you know, the harms committed against our people. And, my mother and I, you know, were able to reconcile and make peace. And, you know, I respect my mother deeply with my heart, because she gave me life. And, I try my best, you know, to try and be the best daughter I can be. But, I respect my mom. You know, and, I don’t say bad things and stuff to her anymore. But, that was part of, you know, my cycle of change as well.

So, when I was a little girl I also witnessed violence in our community. I witnessed violence as a result of the alcoholism which was in our homes. And,
very graphic and extreme, so, you know, blood, gore, horrible. To this day I can’t watch horror shows. Also, I don’t like how it depicts those acts of violence against women, because it’s mostly women who are being impacted by violence in horror movies. Very sick.

I think I was probably five years old. I think I was in Grade 1 when I told the teacher what happened to me. And so, I remember being taken, I don’t know how long, but I remember going to the hospital or to an examining room or something. And so, they, you know, looked me over and tried to find, like, some sort of evidence or something that this in fact had actually happened to me. But, I knew what had happened to me, and I think that I trusted my teacher, you know, for her to be able to, I don’t know, help me or something in some way.

So, after that, there was nothing found, like, no conclusion, and there were no charges that were brought forth to my stepfather. And so, you know, my childhood I was back and forth between foster homes and my mom. And, I think my very first foster home that I went to -- I don’t have a lot of recollections, like the recollections that I do have are of trauma. So, you know, I know that I suffered from forms of torture. And so, with that, that means that I was confined while I was in a foster home. So, that meant that the door was locked.
I had no human contact. I was fed food from under the door. I remember I was on the third floor, or whatever. There were windows below me, and then the ground. And, I jumped out of that window, and I took off and I wanted to see my mom. I didn’t have, like, visitations with my mom at all. I didn’t have any visitation with my family.

I remember being in one foster home, I must have been seven, because I think I became a ward of the court when I was seven years old. And, during that time I remember being in foster homes. And, I don’t ever remember, like, having any bonding. I never had, like, that bonding or that love provided to me, like children should have. I also didn’t have any counselling services or connection to culture provided to me. And, I never got to see any of my family either during that time.

So, my good friend, John Samm, you know, he talked about some of his experience being a Sixties Scoop survivor, and he talked about his life as a white man. You know, and I believe that, you know, when I was a little girl that they tried to make me live like a white girl. Sorry. And, I don’t mean to be disrespectful, but in some ways, I kind of think it’s a little bit funny.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** Juanita, I’m sorry, do you mind if I ask you a question?
MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: Okay.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: The foster home, how old were you when you first went into a foster home the first time?

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: No, no, the first time. Hold old was I? Was I four?

MS. DESJARLAIS’ MOTHER: Seven.

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: I was seven?

MS. DESJARLAIS’ MOTHER: Yeah.

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: Was I seven?

MS. DESJARLAIS’ MOTHER: Yeah. You were big already.

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: I think I read in my files, though ---

MS. DESJARLAIS’ MOTHER: You have four siblings that are younger than you. And, you and Shane are three years apart.

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: Oh. Well, somewhere in my files I think it said I was five.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Okay. And, were the foster homes outside of the community or in the community?

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: I think they were -- I remember that I was born in Alberta. And, I remember being first apprehended when I lived in Fort McMurray, Alberta; right? Yes. Fort McMurray, Alberta. There were
other times -- like, I did go back to live with my mom a few times, and then we were apprehended again. I don’t remember, like, fully, the ages. But, I believe that by the time I was seven or eight, I think I was seven, because I did attempt to read my files from when I was a child. But, at that time, I wasn’t fully ready to be able to face that.

And, they shipped me from Alberta with my perpetrator. So, the man who sexually abused me and molested me as a child was the one who they placed me back into his care to move here to B.C. to be -- I think we were wards of the court at that time. And, I’m not sure how old I was. My mother says I was seven or eight, but I believe I was probably around that age.

And, all the times, like, you know, I was with these different families, and I have no recollection -- like, I remember, like, one was RCMP bomb squad guy. And that’s the gist of my memory. I remember having a bedroom, and a TV in it, and a double bed. But, I don’t remember having a relationship with the people; right? All I know is that I didn’t have any relationships with the people, and my heart always, you know, mourned and cried for my family.

Like, I cried. I cried, and cried, and cried, all the time, for my mom. And, I think the last
time I was actually able to see her was while we were here in Vancouver. And, that wasn’t long after we got shipped over here from Alberta. And, that was the -- and, she gifted me some moccasins; right? Yes, she gifted me some moccasins. And, I believe that, you know, she probably knew that that would be one of the last times that she saw us.

And then after that we went to another foster home, where we were all to be shipped out to different places. And, my younger brothers were the ones to go first.

**MS. DESJARLAIS’ MOTHER:** 1983.

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** 1983. It’s funny, because in 1986, I came to Vancouver, and I lived in the downtown east side at that time. And, all that time I was a ward of the court, ward of the government, where they are supposed to know better. They took me away from my family to be a part of that exploitation of myself, because -- and the Crown. So, the Crown, meaning, you know, the RCMP, the social workers, and Vancouver Police Department, because they are all employed by the Crown.

You know, there were a few people, actually -- I can’t say that -- it wasn’t, you know, all bad, because there were a few people who went above and beyond in my youth, where, you know, today I see, you know, those
seeds that they planted in my life. And, one of them was Jerry Adams. I just want to say, “I love you, Jerry. Thanks for being a part of my childhood in a good way.”

But, yeah, I don’t know where I was.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** So, maybe if you could share a bit about when you were living on the downtown east side of Vancouver, the lifestyle you started when you ran way?

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** So, I actually -- I don't know what age I was. I might have been eight when a social worker actually -- his name was Vaughn (ph), and he sat me down, because none of the houses that I had lived in ever worked out. I never felt like I was a part of the family, or I never felt like -- that I was loved or cared about.

And so, at seven or eight, I remember being in a park with Vaughn and, you know, I was running and jumping around and having fun, because I was outside, and it was good. And then he asked me, he says, “What do you want?” And, I’m a seven/eight-year-old girl, and I said, “What do you mean?” He’s like, “Where do you want to live? Who do you want to live with?” And, I was like, seven or eight, and somehow, I came up with, “I want to live with my own people. And, I want them to have lots of kids, and be connected to sports.” Because that’s all I -- I don't
know, somehow, I got that from I think like TV or something. I may have seen something on TV at some time, because that was my only kind of, like, connection.

I remember seeing Buffy Sainte-Marie on Sesame Street, and she was my hero, because I saw someone that had long hair. Oh yeah, and that was another thing.

So, somewhere between five years old and seven or eight, I had long beautiful hair that used to go -- well, yeah, just like now. Except, you know, in one of the homes that I moved in, they cut my hair. And, they didn’t ask me if they could cut my hair. And, I remember just feeling very sad, you know, and disconnected, because that was a part of me. You know, I had lot of memories, you know, of my mom. My mom, you know, brushing my hair and braiding my hair and that. So, yeah.

So, when I was with Vaugh, and he asked me those questions, you know, somehow, I told him that I wanted to live with Native people. So, he put me in his car, and he took me for a drive, and he went past -- this was in Mission, actually, Mission, B.C. And, we went past this big, giant building that was a school. What I didn’t now then was that it was a residential school. And, that residential school was called St. Mary’s.

And so, he goes, “Do you want to go to school here? This is a good school.” And, blah, blah,
Juanita Desjarlais

blah -- I don’t remember what else he said. And, I just remember looking at that school, and I didn’t see any kids outside. I didn’t see any, like, laughter, I didn’t see anything like that. And, something told me, you know, I didn’t want to go to that school. So, I told him, “No, I want to go to school where all the other kids go to school, wherever that is.”

And so, they found a Native home placement for me, and I grew up in Chehalis, which is in the lower mainland. And, I believe that it was probably one of the longest places that I ever actually lived as a child. So, I think I was probably 15 years old, and I had been raped. So, basically, I went to a party that I wasn’t supposed to go to, and one of the neighbours raped me. And, I came to, and he was on top of me. And, I felt nothing but shame and guilt and dirtiness because, you know, that had happened, and it was wrong, and he didn’t -- you know. I don’t believe he was held accountable, either, for what he had done to me.

So then I went to, well, what I thought was my friend, but she wasn’t a friend of mine. And, she told me to come to Vancouver. She goes, “Go to Vancouver, and look for this person, so-and-so, Remy, or whatever. And, change your name. And, here’s a bag of clothes.”

So, off I went to Vancouver. You know, and
I was-- like, I didn’t know about jails, really. I didn’t know about that kind of lifestyle, kind of. So, I got in with a -- people eventually, kind of, like, took me in, because I had no place to go. And so, what they started me on was pills, at that time. You know, I wanted to fit in, and I wanted to be cool. But, I didn’t really understand the dangers and everything else. So, I had smoked some -- I can’t remember what I smoked, but it was a pill. And so, I remember waking up one day, and, apparently, I was out for four days. And, I woke up in this stranger’s room. And, there was two men in there, you know. And, I was laying on the bed. And, I can only imagine, you know, what happened to me. That was my first experience -- or my, I don’t know what experience, how many experiences of rape I had experienced at that time.

And, my next -- I guess some of the things that I’m talking about are some of the more significant things that I remember. But, I have a path full of instances, experiences like that, that no child should ever have to experience. One of my recommendations is that rape should be punishable by a minimum of ten years. If I wear a face mask when I go out to a rally, or to show my support to Mother Earth, or the land, or the water, as spiritual people, I can go to jail for ten years for wearing a face mask. Where is the justice?
Why isn’t, you know, our judicial system -- I hope to see those changes. You know, not just for me, but every other little girl and little boy out there. You know, every woman out there, you know, who has experienced rape, molestation, child abuse, you know, those ways, because it’s very important to send a clear message. And, somehow our government, Harper, Trudeau, all the Ministers beforehand, they haven’t addressed that issue, in a way.

And, I challenge, you know, Trudeau to step forward to do what’s right, you know, to protect the little girls, the little boys, and the women, you know, from those harms. They can easily make those changes and recommendations in the Senate if they can make those recommendations to get ten years for wearing a face mask, you know, hiding your face. And, you know, a lot of the laws are outdated. But, where was I?

Oh yeah. So, you know, I talk about my -- well, not my, but I talk about the perpetrator, who was my stepfather. I believe he groomed me along that path to be sexually exploited. I heard this one woman share one time, and she was very powerful in sharing her story, and she really inspired me. You know, because a lot of what I experience today, in terms of shame, you know, it’s not my to own, and it doesn’t belong to me. That belongs to the perpetrator.
And, there’s a lot of perpetrators out there, you know, in our communities. It’s a direct result of colonialism and genocide. And, also, that relationship between the RCMP and the police departments, they contribute, you know, to that discrimination and racism in a huge way. I experienced violence at the hands of the police many times as well, you know. And, they released me, you know, so that they didn’t have to take me in, because they knew that people would talk about it; right? And, because it was still out there, my addiction, you know, I wanted to go back and use drugs. And so, you know, they were perpetrators.

But, when I was about 16, I had been introduced to cocaine, and I had also started -- that was also the time where I was put out onto the street, and I was told that I needed to be able to make money for the drugs that I was consuming, and that I owed them. So, I did what I was told to do. Because I think at that time I felt like I didn’t have a choice, because I was living or staying with these adults, you know, who wanted to use me for their own purposes, whether that be sexual or monetary wise. So, I wasn’t viewed as a human being, or a young girl. I was subjectified.

And so, I remember my first experience, and I couldn’t do it. And, I begged, and I pleaded, you know,
with that guy to give me money or I was going to get beat up. And, somehow, that guy felt sorry for me; right? But, you have to remember that I was a 15-year-old girl, and this was, like, a 50-year-old man; right? Somebody’s husband, somebody in the business area, or something. Maybe he was a minister, who knows? But, I can tell you, from my experience, that there were many men and walks of life, mostly they were Caucasian men, but men of, you know, all colours.

And, I apparently was part of the problem. But, that has to do with, you know, the history of colonization; right? The time where women would rather accept money for it, than to be forced to be raped, or to watch their children be raped. So, I believe that that’s how the brothels came to be.

But, you know, during that time, too, it was the women, you know, who would be arrested and jailed for that, and the perpetrators, again, you know, being set free. You know, a slap on the wrist. These pedophiles. They are pedophiles; right? And, you know, I know for a fact that I did run into police officers. And, I remember talking with the lawyer here, and she asked me, “Did any of those officers ever ask you if you were okay?” And, I don’t recall any of them asking me.

Actually, later on in life, I was probably,
like, 17 or something, and I remember one officer asking me if I was okay. And, he didn’t arrest me, and I had a warrant. So, he was genuinely concerned for my wellbeing; right? So, that was a good thing.

So, my life, being sexually exploited, you know, continued from there. And, I think by the time I was 16, I experienced -- well, the lifestyle at that time, all I really knew was violence; right? Whether I had to survive and, you know, I was violent, or I had that violence subjected to me. And, I was stabbed. I believe I was 16. Yeah, I may have just been, like, 16. And, it happened at the Brandee’s (ph). And, it was somebody that I knew, and we got into a fight, and then I remember, like, you know, feeling like a wound or something, and then commotion, and then I woke up in the hospital. And, I came to, and I had had surgery, and I didn’t know what happened. And, I was in there, I think, for probably six weeks.

And, you know, the funny thing was is I don’t recall seeing the police; right? They may have come in when I was, you know, half-groggy or coming out of, you know -- I have no idea. But, I don’t recall them coming in, and I believe I was in there for probably about, I think a minimum of six weeks, for sure.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** Do you remember, Juanita, if you filed a complaint following that stabbing?
MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: Yeah, actually.

Well, the social workers did help me with that. So, we did take it to some place, Victims of Crime or something. I don't know. Yeah, Victims of Crime. And then they didn’t want to help me, because they said that I had created or caused that to happen to myself. And, I kind of got mad, and, I don’t know who was helping me, but I did get help. Mostly it was monetary. And, I said, regardless, you know, if I knew the perpetrator or not, or pressed charges, because I was still involved in that lifestyle, I was afraid to come forward; right? I was a young girl. And, I said, you know, I was still a victim of a crime regardless. I had been stabbed, and my life was, you know, at stake, in not just one way.

And so, there was then. So then after that, I met a man who was probably in his thirties. And, he was very violent. He deliberately got me addicted to heroine. I had no idea -- oh yeah, I think at that time I was doing T’s and R’s until, like, cocaine and heroine. I was 16, 16/17 years old. And, you know, I was forced to bring money. So, whatever that meant, like, getting money from other people in whatever capacity, that was how I did that. And also, I was a sexually exploited youth, and so that was just part of that path that I was on at that time.

I also became pregnant from my abuser. And
my abuser fed me cocaine and heroine and probably other things, too, I just can’t remember. I think I was eight months pregnant and somehow I wound up back at the group home. But, during my time at the group home I believe I may have been sober or something maybe for 12 hours. I don't know. And, I had to go to the hospital because I didn’t feel any movement, and I didn’t know what was happening to me was because I was also withdrawing from heroine at that time.

And, I had to give birth to a stillborn baby. But, I believe today that that was supposed to be like that, because I believe that she would have suffered, and the Creator took her, you know, to a place where she wouldn’t have to suffer and hurt, because she would have suffered a great deal.

So, anyways, I don’t know how long after, but I went into the -- I remember being in a depression. I was in a foster home. I didn’t know I was in a depression, but they told me I was in a depression. I was asleep for, I don't know how long. But, I remember just waking up sometimes, and they would try and make me eat and get me to go to the washroom and stuff and have something to drink. So, I was being cared for at that time.

And then somewhere along the line I -- well, I had a funeral for the baby that I had and a burial for
Hearing - Public
Juanita Desjarlais

her. And, not long after I went back out and started using again. And, I went -- well, I didn’t go and look for him, but he found me. He found me. And, I had, like, no choice but to go back there with him at that time.

So, somewhere along that dark road -- well, all this while I experienced violence, extreme violence, and horrible graphic sexual violence at the hands of this man. And, one night, or day, I can’t remember, I was violently assaulted, and my ribs were broken. And, I was beaten to the point where -- like, I was in a lot of pain; right? And so, my mobility was not 100 percent.

Anyways, the violence escalated, and I was -- I believe I was stabbed on the bottom floor, but this person knew that where they stabbed me that there was an artery there and that I would bleed out.

So, anyways, I got to the top floor. This person brought me up, floor by floor, and I think it was on -- I don’t know what floor I was on, but I remember that. And, I remember seeing all of my blood, and it was all, like, coagulated, and I, like, had no movement in my leg at all. And, my ribs were broken. And, I believed that that day I survived a homicide or a potential -- whatever you call that. I survived murder that day. And, only because I found -- nobody would answer their hotel room, nobody. I knocked on so many doors. I dragged myself out of that
bathroom and, somehow, I had a will to live or get away or something; right? And, I knew, and I was able to use my survival skills to get away.

And so, on that last floor, I believe it was like divine intervention or something, you know, I was supposed to live. I was supposed to live to, you know, to share my story, to encourage and inspire our young people, our girls, to be brave one day, you know, to talk about those things that aren’t supposed to be talked -- I mean, they are supposed to be talked about. They are supposed to be talked about. They are not supposed to be kept secret. And, there is a time that’s coming where our younger generations will rise up for what is right, and that healing will begin. And, all those perpetrators that are out there will be ousted, because I believe in that greater good.

So, I found a room that was open. And, I dragged myself there. And, I don't know, I managed to -- I ripped the sheet up, tied my leg. There was a footrest, and I remembered hearing something about raising your injury or whatever above your heart so that you don’t bleed to death. And, I know that I would have been dead. I know that.

Anyways, the next day I woke up and dragged myself, painfully, through the building. And, I don't know
if it was the lobby who called for an ambulance, but they
brought me to the hospital. And so, I remember two
officers coming. I’m pretty sure I received a blood
transfusion at that time, because I lost over half my
blood. They said if I would have lost any more than I
could be gone. But, you know, I remember two officers
coming to the hospital.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** Do you remember what
detachment the two officers were? RCMP or ---

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** Oh, that would have
been Vancouver Police Department.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** Thank you.

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** Yeah. That would
have been the Vancouver Police Department. So, they came
to the bedside, and they asked me some questions. And, I
don’t think they stayed very long. I’m not sure, even,
what kind of state I was in, because I wasn’t well; right?
I mean, I was -- yeah. And so, they maybe stayed for,
like, half an hour or something and then they left. And,
that was the last I seen of them.

And, you know, when I was going over that
with the lawyer here, about ten days ago or something, I
was able to feel my feelings that I wasn’t able to feel
back then. And, I tell you, you know, I was — excuse my
language — I was pretty p-ed off; right? Because my life
mattered, and all of my sisters' lives, you know, mattered as well. You know, I knew over half of the women that were murdered from the downtown east side.

And, you know, when I thought about that, you know, I was really taken aback, you know, and I was, like, didn't my life matter? You know, I was just a young girl. You know, why wouldn't they go further? Why wouldn't they care about me; right?

And, I was really disappointed to know that, you know, another human being that is in this so-called position of authority, you know, could be so detached and inhumane, in my eyes, you know, ignorant, racist, discriminatory; right? Or, even -- what's that called when you get -- oh, desensitized. That's a huge thing. And, yeah.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** So, I understand that two officers came to see you, but there was never any investigation following when they came to see you. Do you know if there was any prosecution to a suspect?

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** No. There was no, in both cases -- in all cases, really. Oh, except for one, because I took the police back when I was raped and beat up and the guy had my clothes; right? And so, I took the police back to the location where the assault and rape happened, because I was too scared to go there alone. They
found a book. They found a book with his -- I don’t know, with one of his -- I think he lived with his mom or something. And, anyways, they -- I don't know, took his van or something, and they found, you know, my DNA in there. They found my tooth in there. They found -- later on, I also found that they also found a thumbprint of blood that didn’t belong to myself or his family, but it wasn’t allowed to be used in court.

So, I don’t know if they were able to look at, you know, any connections to any violence or rapes or murders, you know, to him; right? I don’t know how old I was then, but that’s what I was told afterwards.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** So, if we can take a few steps back, when you were, as a child, when you reported what happened to you to the teacher, was the authorities alerted when they examined you? After they examined you, did you meet with any police officer?

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** Yeah. And, the funny thing was that there was no evidence. They didn’t believe me. And, yet, you know, they believed the perpetrator.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** And, also, when the first -- when you said that at 15 you were raped, did you report it to any authorities?

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** No. I don't know.
I don't know if I may have said something to one of the social workers. I can’t recall. I just knew that, you know, how I felt. And, I felt very ashamed. And, you know, part of me felt like it was partly my fault, even though today I know that it wasn’t my fault. Rape is never anybody’s fault, except the perpetrator’s.

**MS. FANNY WYLDE:** So, with this environment, living with a very violent man, working on the streets, how did you manage to get out of that lifestyle?

**MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS:** Well, I think I first started getting sober in 1990. I met a man and started a relationship. And, I became pregnant. I think I met him while I was pregnant. I think I had another stillborn. But, anyways, a child did result out of that relationship. And, I was sober and clean. But, you know, his family was racist and discriminatory against me and, also, I believe, against my son. He grew up with them. But, you know, I knew that they didn’t like me because I was Indian. I thought that, you know, I was stereotyped, and that, you know, I was no good for nothing.

But, my son, you know, grew up with those views. And, I took them to court, and I did all the things that I was supposed to do. I paid for therapy for my son. They were supposed to bring him to therapy sessions, because they were concerned that by seeing me that it was
going to do damage and stuff to him. But, there was always an excuse that he didn’t want to see me.

But, I continued, you know, trying to see him, week after week. For years I would go to their front door, knock, and I would say, “I’m here to see my son.” And, it was the same thing. “Oh, just wait, I’ll go see if he wants to see you. I’ll talk to him this time.” Maybe it was, like, every couple of weeks or something. And, she would come back to the door, “No, he doesn’t want to see you right now.” So, I’d say, “Okay.” Right? And, I thought I was doing the right thing by leaving him there. But what I discovered was that he, too, didn’t get to grow up with that same love and care.

He came to live with me when he was 15 years old. We lead a different way of life today, because I did get sober. And, I really got sober, I don’t know, like, maybe 12 years ago, 10 years ago, 11 years ago, something like that. Like, really, really. When I found this cultural, spiritual way of life. And, my son and I had gone to -- well, we were going to sweat, and then we got invited to go to sun dance. And so, we went to our first sun dance. And, because I was just newly sober, even though I was only out there for a month, but to me it seemed like a lifetime, and everything spiralled out of control.
But he -- I knew, something inside of me just knew that that was the place for healing. That was going to help our family. Mostly it was going to help my son so that we could rebuild our relationship, that we could get that support, unconditional love, the teachings, you know? And, everything that I had felt, you know, at that ceremony, was completely opposite to what I experienced, you know, like, going to therapy -- well, except for with my one therapist, because she was pretty awesome. But, you know, like any of the other groups, like I never, like, really ever felt like, you know, it matched me, or that, you know -- it was just different.

But, I knew through there that that was our doorway. That was our doorway to change, and that change happened, right, and is still happening today. And, my son, you know, he gets to have a different life than what I experienced. Because everything I did with him was completely backwards to the Western way of live, the Western way of living. And, because I chose to do that in that manner, right, my son, you know, has been surrounded by very, very strong, you know, spiritual people, spiritual men who walk in a good way. My son, you know, has had very strong spiritual life-givers, you know, on his path to help bring that balance and those good things in life and, you know, those skills and those medicines and all those
teachings. He doesn’t go to school; he goes to Indian school, you know. And, that’s a good thing so that he can continue to carry forward, you know, those teachings and traditional way of life, those medicine songs, to carry that medicine forward for our young people.

And, I think that’s why, you know, I was able to live, because Creator chose me, my son chose me to be his mother before he came to me. And, because of that gift of life, my life is different. Because it was through his spirit that my life was allowed to change, or that changed, you know. And, through that, because I have a harder time at life, then I too was gifted with things to help me on my path. And, now it’s up to me to share that medicine, that strength, that bravery, honesty, humility, truthfulness, generosity, to continue walking in that way, to share with our young people, our women and our men. Because our ways haven’t been forgotten. They’ve been put away, and our people are coming back even stronger.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: I would like to invite you now, Juanita, if you’d like to share ---

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: Oh yeah, one more thing. Culture saves lives.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: So, if you’re ready, Juanita, I would like to invite you to share observations or recommendations to provide to the Commissioner.
MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: Oh yeah, I just wanted to share, too, that our family member, Violet Herman, was murdered in the downtown east side in 2003. And, you know, I had gotten to know Violet a little bit, you know, at that time. And, I know that we are distant family, but for me, at that time, you know, knowing any family, because I didn’t get to grow up with any family at all, was somewhat meaningful to me. And so, Pavel was, I think, maybe two or coming up to be two or something like that, at that time.

And, you know, I can only -- you know, I look at her life and the loss, you know, to the family, to her direct family, to her mother, to her father. My mom knows better than I do regarding family and that, but to this day her murder is also unsolved; right? And, when you look at all the stories that are shared, people’s experiences, like, these aren’t just stories, these are people’s real-life experiences of, you know, doors being slammed, you know, in faces, and lack of, you know, humanness. You know, they are -- I don’t understand, like, how people, like, especially like the police services, you know, they don’t have a heart. Like, their profiling is racially profiled. You know, if someone has a history of running away or something, they don’t take it seriously, you know.
But, all these experiences, you know, during my time in the downtown east side, I spent a lot of years doing other things, other kinds of crime and stuff like that, but during which time, you know, I was also assaulted by various officers of the Vancouver Police Department. Most times I was dropped off, you know, like, at the edge of town and, like, pepper sprayed. You know, they take you away in the paddy wagon, yeah, and so they would, you know, kick you out at the end of town so that they didn’t have to take you back to the detachment, like to city cells, because once they book you in, then they have to record everything; right?

But, yeah, I’ve been assaulted by Vancouver Police officers a number of times. And then I remember one day I got angry. I think it was an Asian cop, and it was right by the cheque cashing place at Main and Hastings, in the little indent or whatever, like in a doorway thing, you know, and he started pushing me around. And, I got mad at him. And, I told him, I said, “You’re an insult to your uniform. How dare, you know, how dare you assault me, push me around. You took an oath to protect and serve. You’re a disgrace to your uniform, you know. You’re part of the problem, you know, projecting that violence against women.”

I may have been 80 pounds, maybe 90 pounds at the max; right? And, here was a healthy man, in a
position of authority, pushing around a 90-pound woman, or
girl. I was a girl; right? I was stunted because of my
time out there.

But, yeah, I was also out there when a lot
of the women were being plucked off the streets. And, I
was never interviewed by any police officer. I reported at
one time -- I didn’t know at that time that Pickton was
murdering people. So, I reported seeing a man in a red,
like, kind of like Datsun or something. It was like a
reddy-brown or red little two-seater pick-up truck, Datsun
or whatever, and it had -- he had facial hair. But, what I
remember the most was that there was a woman who was in the
passenger seat, and I was like walking down the street, and
it was down by -- what’s one block before Astoria?
Princess? Somewhere around there.

Well, anyways, it was around Princess Street
or something, and I don’t know what I was doing, but I was
walking up the street. And then there was an alley, and
then I don't know what made me turn around and look, but I
turned around and I looked, and the red Datsun was going
by. And, there was this woman in there, and she had blonde
hair, and her eyes were open, and she had like a blueish
tinge to her, and she was just laying there. And, like,
there was a blanket or something on her; I don't know.

Anyways, I was like, oh my god, did I just
see that? And, I could have swore that that woman was dead. I could have swore. And, I did tell somebody, and I told Dave Dixon. And, at that time Dave Dixon also asked me to keep an eye out, an ear out, for any officers that were -- what did he say? Any officers that were dirty, dirty cops. There was some sort of investigation or something on at that time.

But, you know, like had -- so, I reported that, and I always wondered like why, you know, police didn’t come around and like, you know, talk to women and that; right? But, you know, at that time, I believe I may have, may have, seen Serena Abbotsway. I may have been the last person, or not the last person, besides the perpetrator, you know, seeing her being picked up. Because, at that time in my life, I was in the downtown east side, and I was in that block there. And, you know, I saw her jump into a vehicle. And, had the police, you know, like, come and done the missing person’s report and come downtown and talk to people, well, maybe, you know, at that time my description of the vehicle, you know, like, other vehicle maybe, maybe they would have found it. Maybe they would have found her. Maybe they would have found, you know -- they would have stopped, like, the murders, you know, of our other sisters; right? But, I didn’t know at that time that all that stuff was going on.
And then Dawn went missing as well. Dawn Cray went missing as well. There were a few other women that went missing and stuff as well. I was friends with Sarah de Vries. I knew Sarah since I was like 16 years old. The first time she was gutted, I was one of the women, like, who got to talk to her as soon as she was out of the hospital. Like, she left the hospital, and she used to have all these staples in her belly. And then she told me, “Oh yeah, I just got out of the hospital.” And, I was talking to her. I was like, “Well, do you remember, like, what happened?” And, she told me how it happened, but she didn’t remember anything, like, after that. And then she was found in a garbage bin or a garbage -- one of those big dumpsters.

I’m kind of going all over the place here, but it’s kind of what happens sometimes. Like, oh yeah, I remember this and, oh yeah, I remember that. And, oh my God, I forgot this. And, I tried my best to take some notes.

But, one of my recommendations is that there be an equal, equal, no reference to ethnicity, so that there can be a universal, fair, hopefully, process in which investigations are done. And, a more thorough process, set of steps, protocols, that, you know, are developed with community input or input from the families; right? Because
I think in order for things to work, they can brainstorm and think-tank all they want, but really they need to engage, not with the same family member, but a group of family members. You know, people who can, you know, create, you know, those bridges so that change can happen, so that there is no discrimination happening. Because, essentially, we are all human beings; right?

I am not that person that I was back then. I was born an innocent baby, just like anybody else in this room, you know. And, my life wasn’t destined to be an alcoholic or an addict. My life wasn’t destined to be any of those experiences that I experienced out there. But, because I suffered from trauma, from colonialism, and genocide, and loss of culture, loss of language, and loss of family, I suffered even more trauma as a result.

So, in terms of changes -- I lost track there. But, I did write some things down here. So, it’s in regards to family violence and sexual violence on the reserves, or in remote communities, even in the city, but mostly for -- because I came from a small community, and I came into the city, a lot of the sisters that were murdered were from smaller communities as well, and they came into the city. So, it’s not uncommon. It’s actually very common. So, in order to address or invite healing, that -- I’ve also, you know, had the privilege of being able to
work with girls, with women, and also with women who work 
in those remote communities, to be able to hear of the 
challenges, you know, that they face. And so, most times, 
you know, what’s dividing the perpetrator and the victim is 
a shower curtain.

Like, how does that happen? Where is the 
privacy? Where is the respect, you know, for -- and, most 
times, that’s a little girl with a man, like an elder -- 
sorry, not an elder, a senior citizen. You know, the 
rights, you know, of that little girl are not protected, 
you know. We’re not doing our best to be able to humanize, 
you know, the experience. It’s dehumanizing. And, we need 
to do better.

We need to do better to protect our girls. 

We need to have medical services on reserve; right? Not 
just a fly-in doctor or whatever. There needs to be some 
sort of medical station on each reserve. Who cares, it 
costs money to build, but I’m sure there are people who are 
willing to donate their time as long as the government or 
somebody, you know, is willing to donate the materials. 
You know, together people can do and create, you know, all 
sorts of great things; right?

But, you know, I know that medical services 
are one of the things, you know, according to Jordan’s 
Principle, right, you know, and it also helps the
communities; right? Like, people can actually go in and get an exam, you know, get examined if they’ve been violated. Or, they can get that support, right? And, it’s a beginning. Safe houses or a safety house where it’s clearly safe and where the community supports that action and that change; right? Instead of protecting the perpetrator, which might be your cousin, it might be your uncle, and it’s really sad, but it also might be your grandpa or your brother.

But, I do believe in change. I believe that through our cultural ways, and through education, and the implementation, you know, of support services, and real change, right, in the communities, especially the remote communities. We have a responsibility to each other.

We also have a responsibility to promote that dialogue, to promote change and safety, to support our unintended, like, victims. I hate saying that word, “victims,” right? So that those services be there for our young girls and our boys, because we know it’s happening.

I can tell you a stat about one of the communities. And, I think I saw something recently and it said 98 percent of the community in the Nitinaht Nation has been subjected to sexual abuse, 98 percent. What does that say? Two hundred years of colonialism, the impacts upon our people, rape, violence, and, you know, genocide. What
does that mean? That means that they want to change us. They want us to stay sick, but that needs to change.

I had some other things. Oh yeah. So, one of the other things was I’m also a Sixties Scoop survivor, and I’m Indian. Actually, I’m Neehehow (ph) and I’m Dene, and because I don’t have a paper saying I am Indian, and because of genocide, I don’t belong to a specific community or any nation because of that. But, through my family and word of mouth, I know where I belong now. The government doesn’t provide that to me, or for me, or make it easy or accessible, but instead discriminates against me.

I want to have that same right. I’m Native. And, who is the government to say that I’m not. You know, to step forward to sue. There’s currently a case -- well, part of the Sixties Scoop is that you need to be status Indian in order to sue. But, I can tell you that my mother, my father, all of my aunties, my uncles, my kokum, and my mushum, they were all brown. And, my dad is brown. And, I’m not -- yeah. And, I shouldn’t have to prove that in order to, you know, share my story again with the government.

One of the other recommendations that I want to make is changes in policies, or changes in legislation regarding -- so, currently there is legislation that has been changed, and it is in support of women fleeing
Hearing - Public
Juanita Desjarlais

violence. So, there is legislation as of 2015, Quebec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Ontario have legislation in place for women fleeing violence. So, basically that legislation states that women who are fleeing violence, there is a clause that women can get their damage deposit back. They don’t have to give an explanation. They get a full refund to be able to go and move and find a safe place to live and not have to depend on, sorry, a man, or whatever – I mean, domestic violence actually happens in both races and stuff – so that the person can move forward. And, I think we live in a time where if we want to, you know, take some good action and be proactive, that we can support that.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you, Juanita.

Anything else?

MS. JUANITA DESJARLAIS: Yeah. It’s that one day I would like to really see that change where our women and our men are considered to be equal. Where there are policies put in place where -- it’s so stupid how it should have to take policies, you know, and recommendations and everything else to make changes. But, yeah, I’d like to see more of those policies, you know, be changed at, you know, every bureaucratic level. Also, one of the other recommendations that I have -- because of my involvement, you know, in the community, you know, sitting on
committees, you know, obviously my past and, you know, the continuation of challenges and hardships that people experience, at a judicial level I would like, you know, to have the judges partake in cultural competency, but beyond that; right? And, cultural competency doesn’t mean just one nation of people. It actually means all nations of people, where one race does not supersede the other. And, I think that really needs to be taught everywhere. You know, that education needs to happen everywhere.

The other recommendation I have is that, you know, because of the continued challenges between the RCMP and indigenous peoples, there are many acts of violence that are committed against our women, because of the colonial history, and also -- yeah, mostly because of the colonial history, right, where it could be anything from being out on the frontlines, you know, in a spiritual way, standing, you know, for our spiritual views, right, our responsibilities, just as our ancestors, you know, prayed for us. But, most often it’s the women, you know, who are targeted by the police, you know. And, that kind of stuff continues. But, I think what I am basically saying is that, what I’ve seen to happen all across Canada and the United States is that a police officer, who is in a position of authority, can assault somebody and can use excessive force; right? And, they should actually be bound
by a code of ethics and also employment standards, where
they are considered to be equal employees, just like
regular people.

So, if they’re going to bring harm against
somebody, and it’s intentional, they should be fired
without pay, or they should be reprimanded, but without
pay; right? So, I don’t understand, like, why the system
supports, you know, this entity, or, like, RCMP officers
and police officers, you know, to continue violating
people. Like, I understand that there are perpetrators,
you know, like, currently within the RCMP detachment and
other places. So, does that kind of make sense?

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Thank you, Juanita. I
will now leave Commissioner Eyolfson if he has any
questions or comments. This is your space.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Thank you.

Thank you, Juanita. I don’t have any specific questions
for you. I just want to thank you for coming here. You’ve
shared a lot with us today, and you’ve given us a lot to
think about. I just want to acknowledge your strength and
resilience in coming here and sharing some of these
difficult and horrible experiences you’ve been through, but
also telling us about finding healing. And, on behalf of
the Inquiry, we are grateful for that gift you shared with
the Inquiry to help us do our work together. So, thank you
for participating. And, I also want to acknowledge your
mom being here, as well, in support. Thank you.

And, as a sign of reciprocity for this
wonderful gift you’ve shared with us, we just have a small
token of appreciation for you. And, I’m going to let
Grandmother Blu explain this little gift that we have for
you, before we adjourn.

ELDER LAUREN BLU WATERS: So, as a small
token of appreciation we would like to offer you this eagle
feather, Juanita, to help you with your journey, and to
help you with your healing, and to give you that strength
to keep going in a good way, to honour you for the way
you’ve turned your life around, and the way that you’ve
become a warrior for those other women, to help them with
their journeys. And, some seeds for you to plant so that
you can see the growth and see the beauty that lies in each
one of us and to help you with your work. So, we’d like to
offer this to you.

MS. FANNY WYLDE: Commissioner Eyolfson, if
we can adjourn this session? Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BRIAN EYOLFSON: Yes, thank
you. Let’s adjourn.

--- Upon adjourning at 15:15
LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST’S CERTIFICATE

I, Shirley Chang, 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.

__________________________
Shirley Chang

April 13, 2018